

Interstellar Hospitality: Missions of Star house Enterprise

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1. Star time

Earth date 2151 is a cosmic time. The threats of atomic and ecological disasters, of poverty and diseases are definitely overcome. The disparate nations and cultures have come to peace and are now ruled by a planetary state, created through the unification of Earth. Beyond any differentiation of race, sex, nationality, or culture, all inhabitants are considered members of one united "Humanity". This is the phantasmatic future designed in the science fiction television series "Star Trek". The impetuosity of this Utopia comes close to Immanuel Kant's Enlightened concept of a Cosmo political "civitas gentium", a united League of Nations comprising all peoples of the globe and held together by the "Idee der Föderalität, die sich allmählich über alle Staaten erstrecken soll, und so zu ewigem Frieden hinführt."¹ Kant knows about the time necessary for states and their citizens to achieve the maturity for such an "eternal peace"; he literally calls it a "cosmic time" and compares it to the circulation of planets.²

The diegetic future world of Star Trek is cosmic in this Kantian sense. Unlike for Kant, in the film series, the development of Humanity's universal civilization is presented not as the result of ethics and laws, but primarily as an achievement of technological progress. The historical moment

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Zum Ewigen Frieden, Werke*, Volume 9, 1970, p. 211.

² I. Kant, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht, Werke*, Bd. 9, 1970, p. 47. See also Julia Kristeva, *Fremde sind wir uns selbst (Étranger à nous-mêmes)*, transl. Xenia Rajewsky, 1990, p. 186-87.

that literally changed the world is told in the fifth TV series entitled *Star Trek Enterprise*, created by Rick Berman and Brannon Braga, covering 4 seasons consisting in 97 Episodes, produced and run (almost simultaneously) from 2001 to 2005. Although this delivery concerns the latest *Star Trek* generation, the time span narrated comes chronologically first. The diegetic times in the other generations are chronological – first comes *Star Trek (The Original Series)* with Captain Kirk narrating the years from 2265 to 2269, followed by *The Next Generation* with Captain Picard featuring from 2364 to 2370, followed by *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* covering the years 2369 to 2375, and finally, *Star Trek: Voyager* with Captain Janeway reaches the farthest in the future since it goes until 2378.³

The fifth generation with Captain Archer's crew is thus a prequel; it moves back to a future past where it was set a century before the area of the "original" series with Kirk and Spock. In doing so, it is old and new at once, and it always has to deal and to play with this anachronistic structure. On the one hand, from a diegetic point of view, this latest *Enterprise* series needs to accurately prepare the technologies of space

³ These are:

- *The original Star Trek*, created by: Gene Roddenberry, 1966–1969, Episodes: 79 (3 seasons), Time span: 2265-2269

- *The Animated Series*, created by Gene Roddenberry, 1973–1974, Episodes: 22 (2 seasons), Time span: 2269-2270

- *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, created by: Gene Roddenberry, 1987–1994, Episodes: 176 (7 seasons), Time span: 2364-2370

- *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, created by: Rick Berman and Michael Piller, 1993-1999, Episodes: 173 (7 seasons), Time span: 2369-2375

- *Star Trek: Voyager*, created by: Rick Berman, Michael Piller, and Jeri Taylor, 1995–2001, Episodes: 168 (7 seasons), Time span: 2371 – 2378

- *Star Trek Enterprise*, created by: Rick Berman and Brannon Braga, 2001–2005, Episodes: 97 (4 seasons), time span: 2151-2155, 2161

travel used in the Original Star Trek.⁴ So to speak belatedly, the Enterprise series' plot had to feature literally mankind's first steps in making contact with foreign worlds and provide the archaeological technologies of the very first space voyages, those preceding the actual (or "Original") Star Trek. On the other hand, from the point of view of film making, the film technologies used for Enterprise in 2001 to 2005 are much more sophisticated than those of the 1960ies. Whereas the "Original" Star Trek was produced in the Desilo Studios equipped with rough props to enact naive film effects, the fifth generation benefited from high-tech computer animation producing special effects, amongst which most famous holographic spaces.⁵

In Captain Archer's 'cosmos', April 2151 is a historical date for Humanity. After decades of engineering and research into making faster star ships for the Earth Starfleet, the "warp five engine" had been developed by his father, Henry Archer, and Zefram Cochrane. According to the 'official Star Trek homepage', the warp reactor is technically known as the "Gravimetric Field Displacement Manifold", consisting of a matter/antimatter reaction assembly. The discovery of warp technology is the initializing moment when humanity leaves its home planet to become a voyager. It is due to this discovery of a revolutionary propulsion technology that Humanity changes from a primitive, planetary pre-warp species to a universal player. This enlargement or exceeding of human territories is not without risk, indeed. After all, the space voyagers must give up the possibility of protection offered by

⁴ For example, whereas Archer's crew is still very suspect of the "transporter", a subspace device to dematerialize an object at one location and to transmit and reassemble it at another, Captain Kirk and his crew use this tool for travelling, also known as the "beamer", on a regular basis. In the Century between Archer and Kirk, the transporter-technology has obviously made it to a common means of transport.

⁵ Memory Alpha, online encyclopedia on Star Trek, (since November 2003), http://memory-alpha.org/en/wiki/Portal:Star_Trek

the host or the house of the United Earth. Crew members inhabit a *ship* rather than a *house*; rather than Cosmo political planetary *citoyens*, they become interstellar ambassadors whose core function is to be a 'foreigner' and literally an 'alien', always the one who is about to arrive, always searching for first contacts to newly to encounter species, an eternal 'newcomer' in the sense of Jacques Derrida's 'arrivant', always heading for the future.⁶

2. Pandora's Box

April 2151 is the moment that the first star ship has been equipped with a warp five engine: the *Enterprise NX-01*. Jonathan Archer is chosen to become its Captain. His task lies in discovering and exploring 'alien' life forms, at best indeed intelligent species, and in studying their modes of civilization. The 'gift' of technology appears as a gift to exploration and literally to "enterprise".

The first, feature-length episode of the series is entitled "Broken Bow". The first act features the situation on Earth some days before the set-off of the prototype star ship *Enterprise*. Archer, accompanied by Commander Charles Tucker, nicknamed Trip, is flying aboard an inspection pod around the *Enterprise* in a space dock orbiting Earth. Both men go into raptures about the star ship's technical equipment:

Trip: *The Ventral Plating Team says they'll be done in about three days.*

Archer: *Be sure they match the colour to the nacelle housings.*

Trip: *Planning to sit on the hull and pose for some postcards?*

Archer: *Maybe.
God, she's a dream.*

⁶ Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, transl. by Patrick Mensah, 1998, p. 61. See also *De l'hospitalité*, p. 33.

Trip: And fast. Warp 4.5 next Thursdays.

Archer: Neptune and back in six minutes.⁷

In this dialogue, the star ship is adored for “her” beauty and strength: “she’s a dream”, Archer says having a sigh of admiration. Throughout the series, “she” functions as an independent agent steering the plot when battling other spaceships, when being “blessed” as much as when triumphing in warrior. This linkage between technology and gender has a long tradition. In Greek mythology, it was Pandora (the “all-gifted”) who was sent by Zeus to seduce mankind. In this scene, Archer and Trip literally behave like once mankind, to whom Zeus sent the beautiful Pandora to bring a box as an offer. This seductive “gift”, however, was in truth the revenge for Prometheus’ theft of the secret of fire. It remarkable that the gesture of the offer carries in it a double structure, as the German word “Gift” demonstrates, which means “pharmakon”, “poison”.⁸ Pandora’s present is emblematic for this ambushing dimension of offers as such, and her strategies of seduction – beauty, grace, and availability qualify as ontologically feminine. Like Pandora’s Box, the star ship enterprise “is a dream” to Archer and Trip, also in the sense of a temptation heading for danger.

Yet unlike this threatening meaning, Pandora’s Box remains at the same time still a ‘gift’ in the literal English sense of the word: a donation, a present, a bargain and – last but not least – a gift *for* ... in the sense of a talent, and thus a task or a duty to develop something in the future. A gift is an obligation. Receiving a gift – and here the German meaning intermingles with the English, implies an injunction for the

⁷ “Broken Bow” (*Star Trek Enterprise*, 5th Generation, season 1, episode 1), Chapter 2, 0:04-05.

⁸ Cf. J.-M. Rabaté and Michael Wetzel (eds.), *L’éthique du don. Jacques Derrida et la pensée du don*, Paris, 1992.

presentee, it turns her or him into a 'donee' with a commitment for the future.

It is significant that according to the myth, it was not Prometheus himself who accepted and opened Pandora's Box. Prometheus (Προ-μηθευς), the "technician" and literally "the one who is looking forward", had formed mankind from clay, he had taught them crafts and culture, and he had even brought them the fire that Zeus had refused them – like the Vulcans had refused mankind the warp-reactor. Rather, the box was accepted by Prometheus' brother Epimetheus (Ἐπι-μηθευς: the one who is considering afterwards). Although Prometheus had warned him forcefully, he opened the disastrous gift from Pandora and thus released – unanticipatedly and irreversibly – the evils of mankind: greed, vanity, slander, envy and pining, those evils that in the *Star Trek* series were not raised by technological hubris, but precisely overcome by it. In this emphatic passion for technological innovation, the series reveals a techno-ethical position holding against the metaphor of Pandora's Box as a warning for unanticipated and irreversible dealing with technology.

According to Bernard Stiegler, the myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus goes far beyond such mono-directional and mono-causal relationship between technology and time. In *La technique et le temps*, Stiegler argues that it is precisely the inseparable disaccord or division between the two brothers – the one Προ, the other Ἐπι – in which relies for Stiegler the chronological dynamics of the technical. For Stiegler, the relation between technology and time is as contrary to usual ideas about the "development" of technology much more determined by a fundamental and 'original' "*Désorientation*".⁹

⁹ See also Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ähnlichkeit und Berührung: Archäologie, Anachronismus und Modernität des Abdrucks*, (in: *L'Empreinte*. Paris: Centre Pompidou 1997), transl. Christoph Hollender. Köln: Dumont 1999, p. 14ff;

“[...] L’avance prométhéenne et le retard épiméthéen (qui est aussi la faute d’Épiméthée comme *oubli*) trament *ensemble* la *prométheia* comme prévoyance et l’*épimétheia* comme distraction insouciant et médiation après coup.”¹⁰

It is precisely this „pro-epimetheic“ paradox, or discontent (between brothers), which for Stiegler lies at the basis of an “original technicity” (“*une technicité originel*”). The relation between time and technology is thus not structured along a monolinear axis – as suggested in the *Star Trek* series. Rather, the “original technicity” is *always already* determined by the lack of origin.

In *Star Trek* and especially in the fifth generation (*Enterprise*), this double structure is not only significant for the anachronistic relation between the diegetic enactment of the ‘technical as mono-linear development’ and the atavistic film technologies involved. The future concerned in *Star Trek* is already a ‘past future’, it is a future which had to be invented from the point of view of another phantasmatic future, one that is at once ‘looking forward’ because further in time, and - with respect to the narrating time of technical production - ‘looking backwards’, since it mirrors the technological fantasies of the 1960ies. *At the same time*, I will argue in what follows, such an anachronism also marks the chrono-logic of *Enterprise* as the feature of – after all – a voyage. Voyages, in describing the movement of a trajectory or a trace, are always ‘pro-epi-metheic’ because they always include reversals, pauses, and new starts as much as loops and crossings in their spatio-temporal programs.

Sonja Neef, *Abdruck und Spur. Handschrift im Zeitalter ihrer technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, Berlin: Kadmos, 2007 (forthcoming), Chapter „Schreiben und Technik“.

¹⁰ Bernard Stiegler, *La technique et le temps. 1. La faute d’Épiméthée*. Paris: Galilée, 1996, p. 30.

3. First Encounter

Before accompanying the *Enterprise* on its first travel through space, let me turn back to the moment preceding the actual set-off.¹¹ It is not by chance that this first mission of star ship *Enterprise* featured in "Broken Bow", the episode launching the set-off of the series, concerns no less than an ambassadorial intervention caused by a first encounter with an alien species. In the film, this first encounter is enacted as follows. Right after having completed the technical inspection of the *Enterprise* before set-off, Captain Archer is called by Admiral Forrest, the leader of the Starfleet of United Earth, to urgently come to Starfleet Medical. When arriving there, Archer enters into a room where three officials of Starfleet's Admiralty and three alien ambassadors from the planet of Vulcan are observing through a window how a medical team in a neighbored room is treating a patient with high-tech medical equipment. A heated debate is going on between the Starfleet's staff and the representatives of Vulcan.

Being interrupted by Archer's arrival, Admiral Forrest turns himself towards Archer to welcome him as the newcomer at the conference. While shaking hands – in western culture the symbolic gesture of welcoming as such – the admiral asks: "Jon, I think you know everyone?" Archer, being familiar with the presence of Vulcan ambassadors on Earth, ignores the Vulcans. As 'aliens', they are not foreign to him anymore because he has already experienced the Vulcan's insistence on logical thought and their attitude to tutor Humanity in matters of interstellar diplomacy. For this reason, his interest is concentrated only on the foreign patient behind the window, the only one he does not yet know. "Not everyone" he answers to Forrest while gazing worried at the foreigner. Officer Dan from Starfleet, interpreting Archer's gaze as a question, answers on his turn with a touch of doubt

¹¹ http://memory-alpha.org/en/wiki/Broken_Bow

in his voice: "It's a Klingot", whereupon one of the Vulcan Ambassadors corrects him with a know-all expression on his face: "A Klingon." It is with this emphasis on the final syllable – "A Klingon" that the Vulcan speaker underlines his connoisseurship and the superiority of Vulcan species to Earth's Humanity as such. Furthermore, Archer is informed that the stranger was shot by a corn farmer in a place called "Broken Bow", Oklahoma, after a battle with still another hostile species (the Suliban). Moreover, Archer learns that the injured stranger comes from Qo'nos, the home-planet of the Klingon Empire. In passing, one of the Vulcans mentions the Klingon's name: Klaang.

The Vulcans, more experienced in space traveling than humanity, take superciliously initiative in this encounter. They order that "Klaang's corpse" needs to be brought back home to Qo'noS. This Vulcanian order raises a whole complex of questions to Captain Archer and the staff members of Earth's Starfleet. After all, the *Enterprise* would, in doing so, allow an alien guest aboard, it would offer hospitality to a stranger. The informations received indicate moreover that accepting the stranger aboard would carry in it a certain danger. After all, Humanity is inexperienced in encountering the species of the Klingons and in interstellar diplomacy at all. In addition, the strange guest is obviously entangled in an interspecies conflict of which the Starfleet is innocent. Allowing the stranger aboard would also make United Earth, as a host, losing its neutrality by getting involved in the other's hostile conflicts, and becoming responsible for his guest *in every respect*. Captain Archer is also responsible for his ship and his crew, though. In the face of this other, or 'first' responsibility, thus asks the 'first' question, the question which always comes 'before' the 'offer' of hospitality and which precedes the conditions of hospitality as such: he asks – not with words but with gestures – who this stranger is.

The informations Archer receives about the guest-*in-spe* – his offspring, his species, his homeland, and last but not

least: his proper name - do not withhold him from his commitment in taking care for the stranger. Even more, there is another obstacle that Archer is concerned about. Bothered by the term "corpse" in the Vulcan's formulation, Archer objects that their order implies pulling off the lifesaving medical apparatuses and letting the Klingon die. The reason for their decision, thus the Vulcan dignitaries explain, is based on a specificity of Klingon culture itself: "Klaang's culture finds honor in death. If they saw him like this, he'd be disgraced", thus ambassador Soval informs Archer, and the other Vulcan quotes from "the profile report" stored in the Vulcan data base: "They're a warrior race. They dream of dying in battle".¹²

In other words, offering hospitality to this alien for the Vulcans implies treating him according to his own law, tradition, and cultural rites. The protocol they developed for encounters with other species demands nothing less but welcoming the Other aboard *as an alien* and *in acceptance of his alterity*, however distinct this may be from the host's own cultural or ethical values. Archer's resistance to the injunction to bring the Klingon home as an honorable – that is: a dead – warrior, from the point of view of the Vulcanian idea of hospitality, would be raised out of dogmatic geocentric ethical beliefs. The hospitality they demand for the guest aboard a ship of the Federation implies welcoming the foreigner *as a foreigner*, as persisting in his own civilization, law, and language. They claim tolerance towards the guest in Kant's sense of the concept.¹³ Even though this Vulcan concept of hospitality may at first sight look like the fulfillment of

¹² "Broken Bow", Chapter 2, 0:07:40-50.

¹³ „Hospitalität (Wirtbarkeit) bedeutet das Recht eines Fremdlings, seiner Ankunft auf dem Boden eines Fremdlings wegen, von diesem nicht feindselig behandelt zu werden.“ I. Kant, *Zum Ewigen Frieden*, p. 214. "Tolerance" is the political tool for mutual foreign policy to be used for international communities in which law does not take effect.

highest ethical imperative, it unveils nothing less than the *intolerable* question of *tolerance*, or that which Jacques Derrida in his famous essay “De l’hospitalité” has called the terrible, yes unbearable question of hospitality. In what follows, I will discuss this question by focusing on how the Derridian aporia of hospitality is enacted in this film-generated future world, that is, as an effect of aesthetic strategies of camera’s work.

4. Interstellar Hospitality

The film-set I am analyzing now is still not aboard the *Enterprise* but is as yet at its threshold. At this point of the story, the injured Klingon is not yet a passenger, but a candidate *before* shipping, a disputed object to negotiate on. During the entire debate between Starfleet’s officials and Vulcan ambassadors, the camera stays in the conference room next to the medical room, showing close-ups of the speakers involved in the discussion on “the Klingon”, thereby arranging their dialogues in shot-counter shot-montages. “The Klingon” is shown only in the background behind the window; as an unconscious patient he remains the mute object who is not taking part in the discussion.¹⁴ At the moment when Archer draws closer to the window to look at the stranger on display, however, the camera takes a new position. From the *inside* of the medical treating room, it zooms on the foreign patient, showing him in close-up lying in bed. The seven observers (three Vulcans, three Starfleet officers, and Archer) are now standing at the *outside*, behind the window, all gazing at the unconscious Klingon like the seven dwarfs gazing at Snow White in her glass coffin. The Klingon is thus exhibited from two sides. As an object of viewing he finds himself in the middle between two windows and two gazes: from the back window observed by the diegetic viewers, and

¹⁴ Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures, The Subject of Cultural Analysis*. New York und London: Routledge, 1996, p. 1-12.

in the front “*mise-on-abîme*”, literally placed at the abyss of the television screen.



Broken Bow, Chapter 2, 00:06:21

The visual composition of this television image is so striking because it questions the complexity of viewing positions, and along with this, the unravable structure of the concept of hospitality. This viewing situation does no longer just expose “the Klingon” to his diegetic observers, but it also puts the observers *as observers* on display to us, or for us, in our quality as viewers of yet another narratological order, thus destabilizing any fixation of who is gazing at whom in this *tableau*. In doing so, I will argue, the composition of this television image has the capacity to reframe the initial moment of encountering the other in still another way. Like the subject of viewing is displaced from an original and privileged viewing position, the ‘originality’ of the viewed object, emblematic for ‘otherness’ as such, becomes problematic.

Strictly seen, the conflict between the opposite concepts of hospitality favored by either Vulcans or Humans, started already earlier. Already before the actual set-off of the star ship, already at the threshold *to be transgressed*, even before any solution how to deal with the stranger was proposed, the impossibility of offering hospitality, of the ‘offer’ or the ‘gift’ of hospitality, was already inevitable. What

the Vulcan ambassadors defended as the highest, thus most logical, “true”, or “universal” form of hospitality – welcoming the foreigner as a foreigner, *in casu* as a warrior to die in battle – already contravened the conditions of the law of hospitality. For “true” or “absolute” hospitality requires, thus Derrida,

... que j’ouvre mon chez-moi et que je donne non seulement à l’étranger [...] mais à l’autre absolu, inconnu, anonyme, et que je lui *donne lieu*, que je le laisse venir, que je le laisse arriver, et avoir lieu dans le lieu que je lui offre, sans lui demander ni réciprocité (l’entrée dans un pacte) ni même son nom.¹⁵

From this idea of “absolute hospitality”, Derrida distinguishes the so called “conditional hospitality”, which for him is based on a pact. In *Star Trek*, such a pact, or contract, takes shape in the diplomatic interstellar agreements of the United Federation of Planets. When the ambassador mentions the foreigner’s name, “Klaang”, and frames him in a set of identificatory data – his species, his homeland, his cultural rites, and so on –, he in fact quotes from the law, or the contract obliging Vulcan interstellar interventions in accordance to the diplomatic protocol. Already at the moment when Archer - through a visual gesture, namely by expressing worry or confusion on his face - asks the first question: “who is this foreigner”, he and the Vulcan altogether forfeit their chance to become the “true”, “absolute”, or universal hosts for the stranger the Vulcans, as connoisseurs, claim to be. At the moment the Vulcan ambassador corrects Dan authoritatively by stressing the final syllable when pronouncing the name of the species the foreigner comes from, he claims this name “Klingon” for himself, as if to say that Vulcans – and not Humanity – are the actual, or “true” host.

According to the diegetic ethics enacted in the television series, human and Vulcan culture and ethics find themselves always in opposition, and in concurrence to each

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *De l’hospitalité*, Paris : Calmann-Lévy, 1997, p. 29.

other. From the first episode “Broken Bow” on, Archer’s ethical *habitus* as prototypical for human activity as such, is represented as stronger and more valuable than the Vulcanian ethics. Humanity’s strength thereby lies precisely in its weakness, that is its emotional, irrational attitude. However, I will argue – at once *with* and *against* the logic of the story – that the claimed superiority of Archer’s concept of hospitality to that of the Vulcans, is as much problematic as an opposite hierarchical order would be.

After all, asking this first question “what is this foreigner’s name”, “where does he come from”, already demonstrates the impossibility of deciding, or the *indecidability* at work within any constellation of hospitality, and, I will add to this, it is the medium of the television image itself – through its technical conditions - which deconstructs the potential of televisionary fiction to generate a utopian Cosmos grounded on true, or unconditional hospitality. After all, the impossibility of asking, as an indecidable constellation, takes visually shape in the composition of this television image. Because the position of the camera focusing on the foreigner from *inside* the window authorizes him in a visual logic to ask – from his side - the first question. Like Archer and the Vulcanian ambassador on their side of the window, he is the stranger *on the other side*, and he could likewise and with the same authority ask the question of foreignness, and, distressingly enough, he could do so *at the same time*. Like a marry-go-round, the aporia of hospitality keeps turning around this impossible point of origin.

5. Star house Enterprise

The, as Derrida puts it, “distressing paradox of hospitality”¹⁶ still reflects on another problem. For the host offering hospitality to a guest – be it the “*patron*” of a private house, or a government ruling a state – has an injunction because it

¹⁶ „Le douloureux paradoxe“, Derrida, *De l’hospitalité*, p. 55 (transl. SN).

concerns “un État chargé de l’intégrité du territoire, de la souveraineté, de la sûreté et de la défense nationales.”¹⁷ The host finds himself thus always confronted with the difficulty of a paradox obligation. On the one hand, he has the duty to protect the borders of his house, or territory, against intruders from the outside, to guarantee the guest the protection, immunity, or asylum he requires. On the other hand, this invulnerable border must leave passages in order for the guest to come in. In this context, Derrida writes about the perverse, or pervertible, nature of the laws of hospitality, since they presuppose

La nécessité, pour l’hôte, pour celui qui reçoit, de choisir, d’élire, de filtrer, de sélectionner ses invités, ses visiteurs ou ses hôtes, ceux à qui il décide d’accorder l’asile, le droit de visite ou d’hospitalité. Pas d’hospitalité, au sens classique, sans souveraineté du soi sur le chez-soi, mais comme il n’y a pas non plus d’hospitalité sans finitude, la souveraineté ne peut s’exercer qu’en filtrant, choisissant, donc en excluant et en faisant violence.¹⁸

The perversion of the laws of hospitality lies in their nature, that they violate the necessary and indispensable conditions they are based on. In other words: at the basis of hospitality lies inhospitality, namely the power of sovereignty of the hospice towards his guest. And *vice versa*, hospitality is the basic principle of any sovereignty:

Pour constituer l’espace d’une maison habitable et d’un chez-soi, il faut aussi une ouverture, une porte et des fenêtres, il faut livrer un passage à l’étranger. Il n’y a pas de maison ou d’intériorité sans porte ni fenêtres. La monade du chez-soi doit être hospitalière pour être *ipse*, soi-même chez soi, chez-soi habitable dans le rapport à soi du soi.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 58-59.

In the end, there is this endless paradox that hospitality and inhospitality exclude and at the same time need each other in order to take shape.

In a certain sense, the ship can be regarded as the antagonist to the house. Houses are stable, firm, and unalterable – literal *immobiles*; they stand for the *locus habitat*, *Heimat*, or home, and they are emblematic for any idea of soil and fatherland. The ship, on the other hand, lacks all these properties. Instead of for dwelling, the ship stands for traveling.²⁰ Inhabitants of a ship are – at least for the duration of the journey – homeless voyagers *in between* two places.

Archer, as the Captain of a star ship, is undisputedly such a voyager. And yet he simultaneously functions in a certain way as a *maitre de maison*, or a *patron*, because he is sent by the Government of United Earth and authorized by the Federation of Planets to represent “the law”, including the law of hospitality. How many light years away from home Archer may be, being *aboard* the star ship literally situates him *at the threshold* of his home planet, which he keeps orbiting as its official representative. As such, he has the injunction to *enterprise* a travel through space and time and to tie the foreign worlds up to his home world, literally to *anchor* or moor future encounters in past traditions. In this sense, any centrifugal movement of the ship taking its crew away from home always includes a centripetal counter-movement. Along with this oscillation, the *promise* of an *incompromisable* hospitality is at once authorized and restricted by this double logic of place. The laws of hospitality to *transgress the border* are at once displacing and stabilizing the borders of the house, seen as the territory where power, rules and commands get a topologic foundation. The law of the ship as a *locus mobile* is based on the logic of the house, and *vice versa*. At all times, the host as a

²⁰ „Der Mensch kann nur im Bleiben sein Sein verwirklichen. Er ist, in dem er wohnt.“ Martin Heidegger, „Bauen Wohnen Denken“, (1951), in: *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. Pfullingen: Neske, 1978, p. 139-156.

stable and immobile *locus habitat* that guarantees the “house right”, concerns a “migratory space”, of which the ship as a non-place is emblematic.²¹

²¹ For the concept of non-place see Marc Augé, *Non Places – Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, London, 1995, p. 77-8.

6. Universal Translation

Some time after set-off, thus the film-story runs, the Klingon patient is regaining consciousness. In sickbay, Captain Archer tries to interrogate his passenger with the help of his communication officer Hoshi Sato. The foreigner repeatedly roars something towards Hoshi, but as he speaks in his own language, she cannot understand what he is saying. Even though his speech remains incomprehensible, it sounds hard and aggressive, precisely corresponding to how a “warrior’s tongue” is expected to sound. Hoshi is nervously pressing buttons on her “Universal Translator”, a technical device with the size of a mobile phone, used to decipher and interpret alien languages into the language of the user.

Hoshi (desperately looking at the “Universal Translator): The translator, it’s not locking on to his dialect. The syntax won’t align.

Klingon (bawling at Hoshi): [*Klingon*]

Archer: Tell him we’re taking him home.

Hoshi (now with a scowl): [*Klingon*]

Klingon (angry): [*Klingon*]

Hoshi (to Archer): He wants to know who we are.

(to the Klingon) [*Klingon*]

Klingon (angry): [*Klingon*]

Hoshi: Ship, he’s asking for his ship back.

Archer: Say it was destroyed.

Hoshi: [*Klingon*]

Klingon (angry): [*Klingon*]

Hoshi: I'm not sure, but I think he said something about eating afterlife?

Archer: Try that translator again.

Hoshi: I'm gonna need to run what we've got through the phonetic processor.

Klingon (angry): [*Klingon*]

Hoshi: He says his wife has grown ugly?

I'm sorry, captain, I'm doing the best I can.

Phlox: Excuse me. His prefrontal cortex is hyper stimulated. I doubt he has any idea what he's saying.

Klingon (angry): [*Klingon*]

Hoshi: I think the doctor's right, captain, unless 'stinky boots' has something to do with all this.²²

What is enacted as a funny conversation here, a conversation full of misunderstandings, turns out at closer sight to be a true communication miracle. After all, conversations to appear funny as an effect of unsuccessful communication based on uncertain meanings, presupposes the possibility of successful communication, from which it deviates as a intricate exception, a mistake, or, as Paul de Man has put it, a "*misfire*". The misfire is identifiable only as funny, or "rhetorical", or "ironic", because on this phantasmatic – or utopian – idea of

²² "Broken Bow", Chapter 5, 0:26:09-27:21.

successful communication.²³ At this point, the *comic* appears *cosmic*.

For the question of hospitality, it is interesting to have a closer look at the rupture causing the humoristic effect in this scene. After all, hospitality, even when regarded as a juridical problem, is in migratory contexts primarily discussed in cultural terms, it depends highly on ethical, religious and linguistic norms. In the conversation between Archer and his Klingon guest, the rupture of misunderstanding is multilayered. It is caused as much by cultural and linguistic interspecies otherness as by the process of translation. This process is enacted as highly technical, because it is generated by a machine, a computer programmed with a “linguacode matrix”²⁴ software enabling its user to analyze *any other language in the universe* after monitoring only a few exemplary utterances, to scan its vocabulary and its grammar in its totality and to translate it into *the language* of globalized Humanity: *in casu* (as in reality) American.

For the cosmic, or universal dimension of this translation miracle, Walter Benjamin’s notion of translation forces itself upon us. Benjamin unfolds the idea of a universal “pure language”, or “true language” in which anything can be said *without loss*. In this admittedly quite mystical – or utopian - conception of an ultimate ‘pure language’ which results in ‘the totality of intentions’ of all languages, translation, for Benjamin, achieves its final shape. The event of translation performed by means of the Universal Translator aboard the *Enterprise*, whereby the speech of a human is uttered in one language and at the same time heard by its addressee (the

²³ Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1979, p. 9-10. See also Jacques Derrida’s discussion of “irony” in “Signature Event Context”, in *Limited Inc*, transl. Samuel Weber, Evanston (IL): Northwestern UP, p. 1-23, here p. 16-17.

²⁴ See: *Memory Alpha, the free Star Trek reference*; http://memory-alpha.org/en/wiki/Universal_translator

Klingon), in his mother tongue, this event is miraculous. It resembles the event of the biblical Pentecost, when the fiery tongues of the apostles prove capable of speaking in their mother tongues and – miraculously enough – be understood by the polyglot residents of multicultural Jerusalem in their own languages (Acts 2, 1-13). Such a biblical concept of a ‘Universal Translator’ lies also at the basis of some new media, digital translation machines, amongst which most famous the online language transmitter ‘Babelfish’ on the Internet. Like in the Pentecost miracle, the function of these devices is to decipher the speech of the other *instantaneously* without bothering too much with her or his otherness.

Hoshi’s universal translator works also instantaneous. Only if the language to be deciphered has never been recorded before, there may appear a time delay until the translator can properly work out a translation. This delay is so striking because it demonstrates that even the high-tech-translation performed by the Universal Translator carries in it the possibility of mistranslating, misunderstanding, so to speak a ‘rest’ in the sense of a risky, supplemental meaning in which the foreign guest persists in his alterity. Already Benjamin pinpointed at “the enormous danger inherent in all translations”.²⁵

In this sense, the cosmic comic showing up during the process of translation is highly dramatical. After all, it remains – at least for a while – *indecidable* for what reason this conversation is so senseless: because of an insufficient technical operativity of the translation tool, because of cultural difference, or – as it finally turned out - because of the inseriousity of one of the speakers (which is also Austin’s favorite solution). It is precisely this *indecidability*, I will argue

²⁵ Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator. An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire’s *Tableaux Parisiens*” (1921), in: *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, transl. Harry Zohn. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968, pp. 69-82, here p. 81.

following Walter Benjamin's theory on translation, which lies at the basis of each attempt *at translating*. For Benjamin, the work of translation has to aim at an ultimate translation in a pure, true, or *universal* language, which can be achieved only *in cosmic times*. This work, however – and here the deconstructive structure of Benjamin's concept which is so urgent and which is so often misjudged in critical theory - is an endless "*Aufgabe*", - a task and an injunction as much as a surrender and a giving up. The mother tongue, as that which is regarded an unmistakable signifier of genealogy, offspring, blood and soil, is for Benjamin always already marked by this split, that the native language is always originally foreign.²⁶ At this point, his concept of Universal Language comes close to the Derridean concept of monolingualism, which Derrida formulates in comparable paradoxical terms, in which a monadic self *and* alterity are expressed at the same time: "I only have one language; it is not mine."²⁷ Benjamin describes a similar *in-betweenness* within his concept of a "universal language" with the figure of the so-called "interlinear version" as the ideal of all translation:

the translation must be one with the original in the form of the interlinear version [...]. For to some degree all great texts contain their *potential translation between the lines*; this is true to the highest degree of sacred writings. The interlinear version of the Scriptures is the prototype or ideal of all translation.²⁸

However sovereign, or monadic, a language may appear, be it in genealogical terms of offspring (mother tongue) or in

²⁶ Michael Wetzels, „Alienationen. Jacques Derridas Dekonstruktion der Muttersprache“, in Jacques Derrida. *Die Einsprachigkeit des Anderen*, p. 141-154. Munich: Fink, 2003, here p. 147.

²⁷ Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, p. 1.

²⁸ Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator", p. 82 (emphasis SN).

juridical terms of nationality (*patria*)²⁹ – here Derrida and Benjamin come together – it is always already *in itself* split by the intervention of the other (or ‘alien’) towards whom it is directed. Within this context, the tool of the Universal Translator, even if it concerns a pop-cultural enactment of interstellar communication rather than Benjamin’s sacral discourse, can be regarded as the technical fulfillment of a phantasmatic, or utopian, universal language.

7. In the End: Arche

"A powerful engine will be built... an engine that will someday help us to travel a hundred times faster than we can today. Imagine it: thousands of inhabited planets at our fingertips. And we'll be able to explore those strange new worlds ... and seek out new life and new civilizations. This engine will let us go boldly ... *where no man has gone before.*"³⁰

With these words, Zefran Cuchrane, the ‘Great Creator’ of the warp five reactor, spoke decades before the set-off of the *Enterprise* to the Congress of United Earth in a historic speech that initiated humanity’s Cosmo-technological future. As the ‘lawful’, namely the genealogical inheritor of the ‘great creator’ of warp five, Captain Jonathan Archer fulfilled the prophecy of the archi-fathers and the obligation expressed in the proper name he was given: Archer. The Greek noun *archós* means ‘leader’, ‘commander’, and derives from the verb *árchein*: *to be the first*. And truly, Archer became the first to go “where no man had gone before” and the one legitimated by the fathers to become a universal *patron*, authorized by his *patria* to ask the first, outrageous question, the question of alterity and hospitality. Archer is literally given the patriarchal authority to define the point from which cosmic space and

²⁹ See Sonja Neef, *Vatersprache Mutterland. Medien der Übersetzung*. Lecture series at Bauhaus University Weimar, 2006, http://www.uni-weimar.de/medien/europa/lehre/vatersprache_mutterland.htm

³⁰ “Broken Bow” +.

cosmic time is to be measured, and the first to master universal language. Thus the prophecy became true – at least in *Star Trek's* diegetic Cosmos.

This Cosmos, I will conclude, does not make any “true”, cosmic, or universalistic claims. Rather, the intervention with the other, or of the other (or alien) takes place by *means* of the *medial* transmission itself. Relying on Benjamin, I would call this an “interlinear version”, as the Cosmic originality of medial technology is both structured and generated by the medium itself. The future in *Star Trek* is as much generated by medial technology as it itself produces it; it is, so to speak, always already *inbetween the lines* of “the original”.

The Universal Translator as a technical equipment belongs undoubtedly to the area of Cosmic Times, and yet as a Cosmic technology, it remains the result of the medium that it itself constitutes. Within this epi-metheic anachronism, the reflection on translation appears as a media-philosophical aporia in which the television itself becomes the subject of translation. And *vice versa*: the Universal Translator, as a television image, becomes literally tele-visual. The key-characteristics of the television as a dispositiv of medial transmission, relies in the suitcase word “Co(s)mic”, in which it is indicated, that all this, from the beginning to the end, is irony: the “co(s)mic” play, or game, of the medium.

