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Chapter 4

Talking Weather from Ge-Rede to Ge-Stell

Babette Babich

WEATHER TALK

Talking about the weather was until recently a cliché expression for time wasting, idle chatter, what Heidegger calls Gerede. Today’s talk of global warming seems altogether different. Yet Heidegger’s analysis of Ge-Stell also permits a complex reading of the mobilization of popular opinion, totalized as he knew this to have been in his own political era. Here it is useful to take up the question of its current totalization along with a reflection on today’s “climatic regimes,” as Bruno Latour has recently spoken of these. For his part, Peter Sloterdijk uses the language of atmoterrorism, and although his analysis draws on long-standing events from the twentieth century, he is virtually alone in so doing. And if Sloterdijk alludes to Luce Irigaray’s *Heidegger and the Forgetting of Air*, Irigaray herself refers more to interiority—that is, yoga and breath. Indeed, most references to atmosphere, breath, are intimate affairs. If, in *Minima Moralia*, Adorno alludes to shame, the embarrassment not only of needing breath, of vulnerability and exposure, but also the awful pain that one is (still) able to breathe (this is the survivor’s culpability), Sloterdijk’s reflections on what he calls “explication” ask us to review what we continue to take for granted. And Sloterdijk crosses academic and other lines by reminding us that the United States’ use of drones for assassination (which became standard military practice with Obama) is a terrorist practice by definition. Weather militarization is on the same continuum.

As opposed to Sloterdijk, when scholars such as Andrew Ross, Ackbar Abbas or Michael Taussig reflect on the weather, they carefully avoid talking about political or military issues. Abbas’s brief essay, “Adorno and the Weather: Critical Theory in an Era of Climate Change,” concerns neither Adorno nor the weather (Abbas begins with Beckett for the first few pages).
yet Abbas does manage to suggest that concern with the weather is a rich person's/first world concern, as if the poor might be pleased to ride to hell in a handbasket if some advantage could be grubbed (an argument which discoverers, as public intellectuals in the age of Trump likewise argue, that capitalist investors and the indigent share the same mind-set).

Taussig, writing on "Wind and Weather," invokes William Dampier's assessment of winds. Taussig's account is mostly unburdened by hermeneutics, a clear advantage of analytic or mainstream ethnography, as result he can limit himself to reflecting on weather truisms. Drawing on Ross's Strange Weather, Taussig argues that what had been a word—for example, mana—evolves over time: "we talk about the weather as a way of avoiding talking about anything else." Here it should be noted, similarly in an ecological and similarly ethico-political context, that Alasdair MacIntyre had earlier elaborated the same argument of contextual translation, and Taussig silently echoes MacIntyre's reflection on the word taboo as MacIntyre discusses, rather more ethno-hermeneutically, environment (and land values), convention, and meaning in After Virtue. It is what things are called, as Nietzsche says—this is the key to his "philosophy of science"—that makes all the difference.

Sloterdijk knows how the names we give or do not give to things work in the media. Talk today is of global warming and CO2 levels but not chemtrails, HAARP, or weather control. Geoengineering enters discussion as a future option, rather than as already deployed and for some time. Thus, the back story to all 'fake news' concerns how what is "fit to print" gets into print and how what is silenced is silenced. Think of Harvey Weinstein over the years but think too of all the Harveys there have been in the entertainment industry, in academia, anywhere there is power, unmentioned scandals.

If Bruno Latour has for some time been telling us that 'we have never been modern,' his recent reflections concern the weather, if they also recall the complexities of his earlier work on Pasteur and laboratories and agricultural economies and centralization, that is, to use the language of Latour's actor-network theory, microbes quite as literal micro-actors, and turning more environmentally, if still on the same continuum, to reflections on climactic regimes in Facing Gaia. By contrast, Sloterdijk documents the inception of our all-too-real modernity, complete with Žižekian expectorations, beginning with the battle of Ypres, including the why and the how of gas warfare in World War I, down to the day and the year:

April 22, 1915, when a specially formed German "gas regiment" launched the first, large-scale operation against French-Canadian troops in the northern Ypres Salient using chlorine gas as their means of combat.
Sloterdijk carries his question through two world wars and beyond, including the firebombing of Dresden, the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but also the deployment (and denial while none the less deploying) of weather control in Vietnam.¹⁵

In Sloterdijk’s spherical analysis, “terror from the air” is the escalation of modern warfare as wars of action-at-a-distance, now “the de facto norm for ‘air battles,’” as “one-sided, irreciprocable air strikes.”¹⁶ Today’s ongoing wars, the ones we Americans stand for, be these wars declared and not, are “ex-plicated” at a distance. Sloterdijk is one step beyond the rhetorical question concerning wars that do or do not “take place,” as Jean Baudrillard put it:¹⁷ past, present, and future. In this way, Sloterdijk frames his discussion of the “militarization of weather,” variously, in the third of his trilogy Spheres: Schaume and earlier as Luftbeben, or Terror from the Air.¹⁸

Sloterdijk’s invocation of Jacob Taubes (and Gnosticism) with reference to Heidegger and Adorno reminds us of Marinetti’s celebration of what the Italian futurist describes as the “beauty” of gasmasks, a stylized provocation made still more clearly with Sloterdijk’s discussion of the battle of Ypres and the aesthetics of yellow foam that is characteristic of fatal lung damage.

These are difficult topics and Sloterdijk takes his points a little further than we are accustomed to seeing in professors of philosophy who are usually fast students of convention. To tell the story of war in the age of its technological reproduction, its escalation, as a “force multiplier” (to quote the Pentagon),¹⁹ Sloterdijk explains the technique involved at Ypres at some visceral length but, more technically, he goes on to describe the firebombing of Dresden, by contrast with the ice of the January 2018 “Bomb Cyclone,” an end of the world in fire: a “blast furnace effect,”

The attackers aimed to generate a fiery central vacuum by dropping a high concentration of incendiary bombs, to produce a hurricane-like suction effect—a so-called firestorm.²⁰

The result of these “surgical” bombing effects was the production of

a special atmosphere capable of burning, carbonizing, desiccating, and asphyxiating at least 35,000 people in the space of one night [which] constituted a radical innovation in the domain of rapid mass killings.²¹

In this continuum, Hiroshima and Nagasaki are force “multipliers” of the Dresden tactics deployed by Winston Churchill and Bomber Harris. Beyond mere escalation, ex-plication articulates Ge-Stell, corresponding to “the scandal of Being taken to its dark limits.”²² Here it is what we do not say that is the key as all of this takes place against a backdrop of official silence
consummate censorship. Sloterdijk’s language of making “radioactivity explicit” contrasts with the expressly inexplicit—occupation censorship entailed that the mention of even the deployment of the bombs would be prohibited in Japan until 1952. And if one can deny an atom bomb, trumpeted in lock step on the front page of every newspaper in the United States,\textsuperscript{23} denying chemtrails overhead is a piece of proverbial cake. Such silencing thus continues to accompany explication (nor do we the consumers worry over much about microwaves or cellphone radiation, or indeed genetically crisped apples and salmon, or the consequences of taking our gas and heat from pipelines and fracking our water). In consequence we have a “radically new level of latency.”\textsuperscript{24}

Sloterdijk focuses on “atmospheric explication”—including current weather manipulation (and it is routine for academics, especially as academics, to deny as “conspiracies,” “fake news,” anything but the official story on anything from JFK to 9/11, think only of the process theologian contra the received view on this, David Ray Griffin,\textsuperscript{25} or indeed the very idea of weather control, including HAARP, chemtrails, etc.). And every academic smiles, as if it were an unquestionable article of faith (faith?) that the government could not, would not be involved in any such thing.

Among public philosophers only Sloterdijk talks weather manipulation for military purposes. And pointing to such a thing is problematic, given that, as Sloterdijk writes,

Built-in to the premises of weather weapons research is a stable moral asymmetry between US acts of warfare and every potential act of warfare: under no other circumstances could there be any way to justify investing public funds in the construction of a technologically asymmetrical weapon of an evidently terrorist nature. Democratically legitimizing atmoterrorism in its advanced form requires a concept of the enemy that gives the use of means for the enemy’s special ionospheric treatment an air of plausibility.\textsuperscript{26}

Sloterdijk’s point concerns HAARP, citing, as already noted, the US Department of Defense’s 1996 publication entitled “Weather as a Force Multiplier: Owning the Weather in 2025,”\textsuperscript{27} naming the 1990s a decade of military escalation not only “previously unthinkable but, largely unbeknownst to the public, in the possibilities of atmoterrorist intervention,”\textsuperscript{28} including the logical implications of the use of drone warfare under Obama (and normalized in a Hollywood movie, which normalization is an important function of the film industry, in this case, an otherwise forgettable film starring Helen Mirren and Alan Rickman, \textit{Eye in the Sky [2015]}, in which quite “far from providing the antidote for terrorist practices, the stratification of weaponry works toward their systematization.”\textsuperscript{29} Thus, Sloterdijk observes,
The fact that the dominant weapons systems since World War II, and particularly in post-1945 US war interventions, are those of the air force, merely betokens the state-terrorist habitus and the ecologization of warfare.  

For Sloterdijk Air-design is the technological response to the phenomenological insight that human being-in-the-world is always and without exception present as a modification of "being-in-the-air."  

Thus, Sloterdijk highlights the difference between phenomenologists who "explicate human dwelling in its global atmospheric conditions" and Irigaray's material insight "that Heidegger's concept of Lichtung be bracketed and replaced by a meditation on air."  

At stake here is the state of what Heidegger called "the question," as questioning is transformed as a possibility in the wake of technology. If we need critical theory to recall this possibility, we are still trying to catch up to the intersection in thinking between Heidegger and Adorno, as Sloterdijk maintains, just to begin to be able to explicate "highly explicit procedures." Thinking being, we can forget to bring the "stars down to earth" such that, for Sloterdijk, "any thinking that stays phenomenological for too long turns into an internal water color which in the best of cases fades into non-technical contemplation."  

THE NEW "MODERN PROMETHEUS"  

The allure of the titan's gift to us, we creatures of lightning and blood and titanic ash, so Mary Shelley suggests in the alternate title of her 1818 novel, A Modern Prometheus, technology is the engine of ambition and the promise of freedom. The ideal of the tool, the modern gadget, contemporary technology signifies possibility and potential, to the extent, as Günther Anders wrote in a parallel with Adorno's reflections on breath in Minima Moralia, of "shaming us"—how we might we measure up to the robots to come, assuming as might well assume that they will one day 'pass' as human,—leaving us to dream of a post-human, transhuman condition beyond the human, Anders argued that we feel inadequate by comparison with the orderly Ge-Stell of the tool, any tool, the inveigled array that is part and parcel of Zeug, as Heidegger writes in Being and Time. This might be called "the Prometheus effect" following Anders' first reflections on "the antiquatedness of humanity" in Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen in 1956, an effect since transmogrified into transhumanism and the cargo-cult aspirations of the same. Like Adorno, who raised the question of our complicity in genocide, Anders went on to raise the question of our complicity in the ongoing violence of
nuclear power plants as these are, as the political theorist Langdon Winner more prosaically argues, alluding to Clausewitz, the continuation of bombs “by other means.”

Shelley’s modern Prometheus was already a creature wrought of body parts, medical detritus, a creature, as a result, of “proud” flesh, insulted, inflamed: in stasis between necrotized tissue and still viable, still functioning organs. This condition of necrotization and inflammation is the condition of any transplant, and the drugs one takes to prevent rejection of the organ are as much to prevent the body’s reaction to decay in today’s medical innovations, hearts and kidneys, lungs and livers, from cadavers, human and not (i.e., xenotransplantation), but above all skin, even faces, and limbs. It is significant that, not unlike Shelley’s early nineteenth-century vision, Ridley Scott’s 1982 Blade Runner shows us a dark world of barely integrated cyborgs; filthy urban landscapes; decaying apartment building infrastructure, complete with ongoing rain, environmental catastrophe.

Even if we have not read Adorno, we live the culture industry: the consummate Ge-Stell of digital media including the all-encompassing imaginary that is the screen. In films and television series, beyond the vistas of the “bad future,” we know the souk-style, third, and off-world markets of scavenged tech debris presumed fetishized as valuable raw materials; Star Wars fans are redeemed by holographic projections, what’s the diff: robot lover, hologram lover, the same bad-tech, apocalypse-as-the-new-Western schematism of the 1981 Road Warrior is still dominant in Blade Runner 2049, where—such is the market—it is capitalism itself, with all its rules, legal claims, and copyright that, mirabile dictu, provides sanctuary, immune to both surveillance “terror from the air,” in the separate independent and therefore sovereign corporation headed by Deckard’s daughter with the prototype replicant Rachael, Dr. Ana Stelline—one almost needs to add © as this corporate security is secured, inviolate—living in a bubble, the better to be safe from the air and its terrors, as she is there, a high-level game designer, techcrafting custom memories™ essential to Neander Wallace’s replicants™.

We are sure that Heidegger has missed the point, we need no god: we need the right tech, the right entrepreneur, cue Elon Musk, or, as he has been disgraced, whoever’s next. And yet, even scholars focused on technology and sociology of knowledge, conversant with digital media, and theorists of artificial intelligence (AI) and robot sex and robot rights seem unaware of the rather more prosaic bubble in which we live—and on the terms of which we publish. Thus, it is not possible to buy anything one might desire in the supermarket market: rather it is only possible to buy just what is available there. Thus, Rupert Sanders’s 2017, Anime-inspired film, Ghost in the Shell offers a similarly dystopian vision of full body replacement (the conceit here is that only the brain need be transplanted to a 3-D printed body, computer
operating systems and minds swappable to the extent of plug and play, viral co-infection, in a stripped down world). In *Black Mirror*, special effects work better if one assumes no wetware and a soft brain upload as upgrade, or, inasmuch as *Black Mirror* specializes in ending badly, an irrevocable downgrade.

**EXPECTORATIONS**

Adorno had early argued a good bourgeois point Facebook now makes obvious:

The notion that every single person considers themselves better in their particular interest than all others, is as long-standing a piece of bourgeois ideology as the overestimation of others as higher than oneself, just because they are the community of all customers. [The source of “likes”] Since the old bourgeois class has abdicated, both lead their afterlife in the Spirit [*Geist*] of intellectuals, who are at the same time the last enemies of the bourgeois, and the last bourgeois. By allowing themselves to still think at all vis-a-vis the naked reproduction of existence, they behave as the privileged; by leaving things in thought, they declare the nullity of their privilege.44

We dedicate our minds to social media, life-on-line, cell phones and earbuds, ignoring the possibilities that thereby our minds can be subject to strictures of “control” by those same means of the “culture industry,” whether that is understood via Benjamin and Adorno and Heidegger on the work of art or by reviewing the use of music as a different kind of military “air-conditioning,” as does Friedrich Kittler and others. Sloterdijk takes the latter point to reflect that because

infrasonic waves affect not only inorganic material but also living organisms—in particular the human brain, which operates in these low frequency zones—HAARP includes the prospect of developing a quasi-neurotelepathic weapon capable of destabilizing the human population with long-distance attacks on their cerebral functions.45

Perhaps it is time to bring Heidegger and Adorno together, highlighting their shared focus on phenomenology and technology for the sake of a critique of reason, cynical and otherwise. Talking weather, daring to question events such as “polar vortices,” “bomb cyclones,”46 or obvious or manifest things such as chemtrails and so on, risks not only, and it is no minor risk, speaking truth to power but, and this is worse for academics, an invitation to mockery as what Sloterdijk calls “a form of incitement to blasphemy.”
As our insurance policies spell it out for us: losses caused by weather are not covered as these are covered as the term “act of God” signifies a technical exclusion.\(^47\) “the principle of the weather is like that of birth and death: it comes from God and from Him alone.”\(^48\) Thus, we opt to talk about climate change or invoke the Anthropocene rather than question already ongoing geo-engineering or weather manipulation.

And there is such a thing as climate change, but like Pogo looking for the enemy, we ourselves are it. More specifically, we are the very deliberate, the very anthropogenic, cause both directly and indirectly, deliberate and incidental. If Anders, via Goethe, had already highlighted the problem of geoengineering with his discussion of the sorcerer’s apprentice as Verschlimmbesserung, Sloterdijk clarifies: “Nowadays what human beings meet in the weather are their own expectorations—become atmospherically objective—of their own industrial-chemotechnical, militaristic, locomotive, and tourist activities.”\(^49\) Buried in this list, it is important to highlight “militaristic.” Describing the “miasmatic air quality in public spaces near cemeteries, slaughtering yards, and cloacas,” Sloterdijk foregrounds a certain consciousness, even broaching “black meteorology,” a chemtrail reference:

A theory of special man-made precipitations which deals with the way that aircraft unfold airspace and are deployed for atmoterrorist and para-artillery purposes.\(^50\)

Beyond Heidegger and Adorno, beyond Sloterdijk, we are still in the wake of modern technology and all its force multiplying effects, we still need to ask after questioning.

NOTES


3. “There is no exit from the entanglement. The only responsible option is to deny oneself the ideological misuse of one’s own existence, and as for the rest, to behave in
private as modestly, inconspicuously and unpretentiously as required, not for reasons of good upbringing, but because of the shame that when one is in hell, there is still air to breathe." Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969), p. 36.


15. It’s a practice that has yet to cease, but weather control and weaponization may be the least of it. One can ‘prime’ reception by speaking in January 2018 of a “Bomb Cyclone” as the technical term for the assault on the Eastern coast of the United States.
United States. See Alan Blinder, Patricia Mazzei, and Jess Bidgoodian cover page, "'Bomb Cyclone': Snow and Bitter Cold Blast the Northeast," New York Times, January 4, 2018. For an analysis of the political use of newspaper headlines and cover pages, with respect to World War I, see David S. Bertolotti, "The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima," in Bertolotti, Culture and Technology (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 1984), pp. 81–112. Today, an ongoing issue would be both the weaponized climate bomb and the nuclear threat, thanks to Trump who, and here he does not differ, despite the unpopularity of saying so, from Hilary Clinton, who, to quote her campaign speeches, made her intentions to keep the nuclear option "on the table" perfectly clear.

18. There are multiple efforts to disseminate this: see Peter Sloterdijk, Sphären. Plurale Sphärologie: Band III: Schäume (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp, 2014); Luftbeben. An den Wurzeln des Terrors (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), available as Terror from the Air.
19. See the US Department of Defense 1996 document: "Weather as a Force Multiplier: Owning the Weather in 2025." Thus, Sloterdijk dares heresy by advertising to public documents available from the US Department of Defence (the United States long ago learned that the best way to conceal its motives was to hide them in plain sight: thus the organization of opposition to terror by terrorist means is justified and no one notices any kind of contradiction).
20. Sloterdijk, Terror from the Air, p. 54.
21. Ibid., p. 66.
22. Ibid., p. 64.
23. See, again, especially the illustrations of the same front pages in Bertolotti, Culture and Technology, pp. 81–112.
24. "The long concealed, the unknown, the unconscious, the never-known, the never-noticed and imperceptible, were forthwith forced to the level of the manifest becoming indirectly noticeable in the form of peeling skin and ulcers, as if they were the result of an invisible fire." Sloterdijk, Terror from the Air, p. 64.
25. The language of concession compounds any issue of discussion. No academic, to my knowledge, other than Sloterdijk, talks about weather control or weaponization, and when it is discussed it is neutralized as "geoengineering" as if we were in the middle of a sci-fi story and could geoform the world overnight rather than doing the geoengineering we have always been doing (ordinary anthropocene slash-and-burn or what we call gardening) and certainly as opposed to the explicit military application of such experiments included interventions. The fact that this is done fazes no one: act of god, we say. Hence in the parallel taboo case of 9/11, the process theologian, who better to speak truth to power, David Ray Griffin did raise sustained questions about 9/11, in a range of some thirteen books. Here I cite just one: The New Pearl Harbor Revisited: 9/11, the Cover-Up, and the Exposé (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch
But although Patrick Aidan Heelan, a philosopher and a scientist (and a theologian), read Griffin’s work and found his arguments persuasive and told me so, Heelan himself did not write about Griffin and to my knowledge, no one has seriously engaged Griffin’s work simply because it is anathema for a scholar today to talk about 9/11 according to anything other than received narrative. If, in philosophy of science, one simply fails to cite outlier views, the practice works across the field (Don Ihde pioneered this to great personal success and advantage in philosophy of technology). The author has thus written essays about this in philosophy of science, with respect to the sociology of models, including weather, social science, what have you. But all of it is so much talking into the wind as colleagues read increasingly narrowly and selectively. This means that if you “dare” to say such things, one’s colleagues know better than to engage what is said thereby to give “airtime” to the subject. This has a name in German—it is what happened to Nietzsche’s first book on tragedy which was never criticized by colleagues in professional journals as much it was simply ignored, a silencing that is still in effect to this day—Todtschweigerei.

27. Ibid., p. 64.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., p. 53.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., p. 93.
32. Ibid. As Sloterdijk here cites Irigaray: “It is not light that creates the clearing but light comes about only in virtue of the transparent levity of air. Light presupposes air.” Luce Irigaray, The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger, trans. Mary Beth Mader (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), p. 166.
34. Sloterdijk, Terror from the Air, pp. 93–94.
35. Shelley, Frankenstein or a Modern Prometheus, p. 1818.
36. This is a rich and complicatedly separate topic, but, for an introductory discussion with further references, see Babette Babich, “On Passing as Human and Robot Love,” in Carlos Prado, ed., Technology is Changing Us for Better or Worse (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2019).
38. See the various contributions to Ryan Crawford and Erik M. Vogt, eds., Adorno and the Concept of Genocide (Amsterdam: Brill, 2006).
39. For discussion of Anders on violence and nuclear power, see Babette Babich, “La violenza della violenza,” in Michaela Latini, Alessandra Sannella, and Alfredo

40. See for a discussion of this theme, including xenotransplantation, the final section of Babette Babich, “Ivan Illich’s *Medical Nemesis* and the ‘Age of the Show’: On the Expropriation of Death,” *Nursing Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (2018): 1–14, see here pp. 11–13.

41. Al Lingis has an important and disquieting reflection on the phenomenology of medical practice as lived for recipients of face transplants. Personal discussion.

42. The dream of recycling for profit and world salvation, which is also a software metaphor for those who cannot write code and are thus compelled to cut and paste hunks of what does work, defects included.

43. This is not a matter of benevolence but prescience and refusal to be bought out by Neander Wallace’s corporation.

44. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*.

45. Sloterdijk, *Terror from the Air*, p. 68.


47. The term “act of God” has for insurance companies a technical, that is legal, definition.


49. Ibid., p. 89.

50. Ibid., p. 51.

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