



TERROR FROM THE AIR

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*Breathless from the strained vigilance, breathless from the
oppressiveness of the stuffy night-air...*

— Hermann Broch, *The Death of Virgil*¹

¹ Hermann Broch, Trans. Untermeyer, New York. 1972, p.109.

Gas Warfare—or: The Atmoterrorist Model

If asked to say in a single sentence and as few words as possible what, apart from its incommensurable achievements in the arts, the 20th century introduced into the history of civilization by way of singular and incomparable features, the response would emerge with three criteria. Anybody wanting to grasp the originality of the era has to consider: the practice of terrorism, the concept of product design, and environmental thinking. With the first, enemy interaction was established on a post-militaristic basis; with the second, functionalism was enabled to re-connect to the world of perception; and with the third, phenomena of life and knowledge became more profoundly linked than ever before. Taken together, all three mark an acceleration in “explication.” In other words: the revealing-inclusion of the background gives underlying manifest operations.

If also asked to determine objectively when this century began, the response could be given to the very day. Using the above as reference points, it can be shown that from the outset all three of this era’s key features were linked together in a common primal scene. The 20th century dawned in a

spectacular revelation on 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. In the weeks leading up to the attack, German soldiers, unnoticed by the enemy, went about secretly installing thousands of gas cylinders along this section of the front to form a battery along the German trench line. At exactly 6 p.m., pioneers of the new regiment, under the command of Colonel Max Peterson, opened 1600 large (40 kg) and 4130 small (20 kg) chlorine-filled cylinders to a prevailing north-northeast wind. “Discharging” the liquefied substance released approximately 150 tons of chlorine into the air, billowing into a gas cloud nearly 6 kilometers wide and 600 to 900 meters deep.¹ An aerial photograph captured the first poison war cloud unfurling over the Ypres front. A favorable wind blew the cloud toward the French positions at a rate of two to three meters per second with a reported toxic concentration of about 0.5 percent—a concentration high enough to ensure severe damage to the lungs and respiratory tracts after long periods of exposure.

1. These descriptions follow the account of Dieter Martinetz, *Der Gas-Krieg 1914–1918. Entwicklung, Einsatz und Herstellung chemischer Kampfstoffe. Das Zusammenwirken von militärischer Führung, Wissenschaft und Industrie*, Bonn: Bernard & Graefe, 1996. Minor variations with regard to the names of places, as well as specific times and quantities, can be found in Olivier Lepick’s monograph, *La grande guerre chimique: 1914–1918*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998.

The French general Jean-Jules Henry Mordacq (1868–1943) was situated five kilometers behind the frontline at the time. Shortly after 6:20 p.m., he received a field call from an officer in the entrenched 1st Tirailleur Regiment: a report that monstrous, yellowish smoke clouds had risen from the German trenches and were drifting toward the French divisions.² On the basis of this alarm, which he initially disbelieved until it was confirmed by several other reports, Mordacq and his adjutants set out on horseback to examine the situation for themselves—before long he and his companions began to suffer from respiratory problems, a violent tingling in their throats and heavy ringing in their ears. When the horses refused to ride on, Mordacq and his team were forced to make their way to the gassed areas on foot. They soon met with heaps of soldiers running in the opposite direction, their tunics undone and weapons discarded, spitting blood and pleading for water. Others were already rolling around on the ground helplessly gasping for air. By 7 p.m., a six-kilometer-wide breach was opened in the French-Canadian front, leaving the German troops to march through and occupy Langemarck.³ The attacking units had nothing for their own protection but gauze pads soaked in a soda and chlorine-binding solution, held over the nose and mouth.

2. Jean-Jules Henry Mordacq, *Le drame de l'Yser*, Paris: Editions de Portiques, 1933, quoted in Rudolf Hanslian (ed.), *Der chemische Krieg*, 3rd Edition Berlin: Mittler, 1935, pp. 123–124.

3. Cf. Martinetz, *Der Gas-Krieg 1914–1918*, p. 23.

Mordacq survived the attack and published his war memoirs the same year that Hitler seized power.

The military success of the operation was never in dispute—only a few days after the events at Ypres, Kaiser Wilhelm II received in private the Scientific Director of the German combat-gas program, the chemistry professor Fritz Haber, who was then director of the Dahlem Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Physical Chemistry and Electrochemistry, to promote him to the rank of captain.⁴ The few criticisms to be heard were to the effect that the German troops, stunned as they were by the new method's efficiency, had failed to capitalize energetically enough on their April 22 triumph. On the other hand, reports about the number of casualties varied dramatically, then as now. Unofficial French sources reported only 625 gas-injured casualties, no more than three of which had succumbed to poisoning, while early German estimates

4. During the war, Prof. Fritz Haber (1868–1934) also directed a department for “poison gas studies” at the War Ministry. As a Jew, he was forced to leave Germany in 1933 after purportedly suggesting the reintroduction of a gas weapon to the *Reichsführung* (German Leadership) that very summer. After a sojourn in England, he died in Basel on January 29, 1934 while en route to Palestine. Several of his relatives were killed at Auschwitz. The so-called Haber's death product is still remembered in military science—the result of multiplying toxic concentration by exposure time (CT product). Almost needless to say, Haber took up similar civilian tasks after 1918—more precisely, agrarian “pest control.” His receiving of the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1918 for having discovered a method to synthesize ammonia provoked an outcry in England and France, where his name was closely associated with the organization of chemical warfare.

totaled 15,000 poisoned and 5000 deaths, figures which, after further investigations, were in fact continuously revised downwards. These discrepancies clearly point to interpretive struggles, shedding light on military-technical and moral significance of the operation in different ways. A Canadian autopsy report on a gassing victim from one of the hardest hit areas stated: “A considerable amount of a foaming, light yellow substance streamed out of the lungs during removal, clearly very protein-rich... the veins on the brain surface were profoundly clogged, all of the smaller blood vessels bulged noticeably.”⁵

While the disastrous 20th century prepares to go down in history books as the “age of extremes”—languishing with the growing ineffectiveness of its concepts and battle-lines—its scenarios of world history are no less yellowed than those of medieval theologians in their calls to liberate the Holy Sepulcher. Notwithstanding, there is one technical model that has emerged from the preceding century with increasing clarity. It might be termed the introduction of the environment into the battle between adversaries.

Ever since artilleries first came into existence, the *métier* of marksmen and warlords consisted in attacking the enemy and his defenses with direct shots. Whoever is to eliminate an adversary in accordance with the rules of the soldierly art of long-distance killing has to create an *intentio directa* on his body by means of a firearm and immobilize the targeted

5. Martinetz, *Der Gas-Krieg 1914–1918*, p. 24.

object with a sufficient number of accurate hits. From the late Middle Ages until the beginning of World War I, the soldier was defined by his ability to summon and “nurture” this intentionality. At the same time, masculinity was also coded with the ability and willingness to kill one’s enemy, in a causally direct fashion, with one’s own weapon or hand. Taking aim at an opponent was, as it were, a continuation of the duel by ballistic means. Even under the conditions of distance fighting and the anonymous war of attrition, the act of killing man-to-man remained so closely tied to pre-bourgeois concepts of personal courage and possible heroism that its effects lingered on despite its act having become anachronistic. If, in the 20th century, members of the army could claim that their profession was still a “manly” and—under wartime conditions—“honest” one, it is thanks to this reference to the danger of a direct, deadly encounter. The weapons-technological manifestation of this is the bayonet-fitted rifle: should the (bourgeois) elimination of an enemy with long-range shots fail for some reason, this weapon suggests the possibility of a (noble and archaic) return to transfixing them from close quarters.

The 20th century will be remembered as the age whose essential thought consisted in targeting no longer the body, but the enemy’s environment. This is the basic idea of terrorism in the more explicit sense. Shakespeare prophetically articulated its principle through Shylock’s line: “You take my life/When you do take the means whereby I live.”⁶ Of

6. *The Merchant of Venice*, Act IV, Scene I.

such means, economic conditions excepted, critical attention today is focused on the essential environmental conditions for human survival. By working on the enemy's environment, these new processes, which consist in suppressing the basic prerequisites for life, yield the contours of a specifically modern, post-Hegelian concept of terror.⁷ Indeed, twentieth-century terror was considerably more than the "I-have-the-right-because-I-want-to" attitude whereby Jacobin self-consciousness would trample over the corpses of those who stood in the way of its freedom; it also bore a fundamental difference to the anarchist and nihilist attacks of the latter third of the 19th century, which were aimed more at a pre-revolutionary destabilization of the late-aristocratic and bourgeois societal order.⁸ In the end, neither can it be confused, in terms of method or objective, with the phobocratic techniques of onetime or future dictatorships, which consist essentially in the use of a calculated mixture of "ceremony

7. Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, New York 1979, p. 359. According to Hegel, terror actualizes "the discrete, absolute hard rigidity and self-willed atomism of actual self-consciousness...The sole work and deed of universal freedom is therefore *death*, a death too which has no inner significance or filling, for what is negated is the empty point of the absolutely free self. It is thus the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouth full of water" (*ibid.*, p.360).

8. For a description emphasizing the difference between individual terror and state terrorism, see Albert Camus, *L'homme révolté*, Paris 1951, in *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, New York: Vintage, 1992, pp. 149–233.

and terror” to bring their own populations to submit.⁹ The terror of our times consists in the emergence of a knowledge of modernized elimination that passes through a theory of the environment, the strength of which is that it enables the terrorist to understand his victims better than they understand themselves. If an enemy’s body can no longer be liquidated with direct hits, then the attacker is forced to make his continued existence impossible by his direct immersion in an unlivable milieu for a sufficiently long period of time.

This conclusion paves the way for modern “chemical war” *qua* an attack on the enemy’s primary, ecologically-dependent vital functions: respiration, central nervous regulations, and sustainable temperature and radiation conditions. What is in fact involved here is the transition from classical warfare to terrorism, to the extent that the postulate of the latter entails dismissing the old “crossing of swords” between equally matched opponents. Terror operates on a level beyond the naïve exchange of armed blows between regular troops; it involves replacing these classical forms of battle with assaults on the environmental conditions of the enemy’s life. What dictates this shift is the emergence of encounters between opponents vastly unequal in strength—as we see in the current conjuncture of non-state wars and hostilities between armed state forces and

9. Cf. Joachim Fest, *Hitler. Eine Biographie*, Munich: Ullstein, 2000, p. 294. Published in English as: *Hitler*, Trans. Richard and Clara Winston, Orlando, Austin, New York, San Diego, Toronto, London: Harcourt, 1974

non-state combatants. In retrospect, the curious thing about the military history of gas warfare between 1915 and 1918 is the fact that through it—and on both sides of the front—state-sponsored forms of environmental terrorism became integrated into so-called regular warfare between lawfully recruited armies. This was, it must be said, in explicit violation of Article 23 of the 1907 Hague Convention, which expressly forbade the use of any kind of poison or suffering-enhancing weapons in operations against the enemy, and *a fortiori* against the non-combatant population.¹⁰ By 1918, the Germans had over nine gas battalions of close to 7000 men, and the Allies thirteen “chemical-troop” battalions of more than 12,000 men. There was a reason why experts could speak of a “war within the war.” The expression announces the moment when exterminism was untied from the traditional violence of war. Numerous statements by World War I soldiers, most notably career officers, bear witness to the fact that gas warfare was seen as a degeneration of war, and as degrading for all involved. Yet there are almost no recorded cases of any servicemen openly opposing this new “law of war.”¹¹

10. Because both sides were aware that they were breaking the laws of war, neither sought reparations from the opposing governments for the use of poison gas. Indeed, until very recently traces of Prof. Haber’s spurious argument that chlorine is not a poison but an irritant (and therefore not subject to the Hague Convention) were still to be found in German nationalist apologetics.

11. Cf. Jörg Friedrich, *Das Gesetz des Krieges: das deutsche Heer in Rußland 1941–1945. Der Prozeß gegen das Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, Munich: Piper, 1993.

The discovery of the “environment” took place in the trenches of World War I. Soldiers on both sides had rendered themselves so inaccessible to the bullets and explosives intended for them that the problem of atmospheric war could not but become pressing. The technical solution developed to resolve this problem came to be known as gas warfare: its principle consisted in enveloping the enemy for a long enough period—in practice at least a few minutes—within a noxious cloud of sufficient “combat concentration” until he fell victim to his natural breathing reflex. These poison clouds hardly ever consisted of gas in the strict physical sense, but of an extremely fine particle dust, released into the air through slight explosions. What emerged from this was the phenomenon of a “second artillery”: instead of aiming at the soldiers and their emplacements, it targeted the air surrounding the enemy body, fuzzing the notion of a “hit.” Thereby anything that got close enough to the object could be considered as sufficiently accurate and so as operatively mastered.¹² In a later development, the new gas artillery fog-generating munitions were combined with the explosive projectiles of classical artillery. Feverish research then began to determine how to counteract the poison cloud’s rapid dissolution, as well as how to stabilize it over the combat area, effects usually achieved with chemical additives to modify the behavior of

12. This effect was anticipated by the massive deployment of explosive ammunition. Cf. Naill Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I*, New York: Basic Books, 2000, p. 308: “Weight of shell was now supposed to make up for any lack of accuracy.”

the highly volatile war dust particles in the desired sense. Almost overnight, after the events at Ypres, a kind of military climatology sprang virtually out of nothing, and it would not be an understatement to recognize it as the *leit*-phenomenon of terrorism. This study of toxic clouds was the first science to provide the 20th century with its identity papers. Such an assertion would have been pataphysical prior to April 22, 1915, but ever since then it would have to be included as a core part of any “ontology of actuality.” The fact that in climatology itself the status of the study of toxic clouds, or theory of unbreathable spaces, is still obscure shows that climate theory has not yet freed itself from the tutelage of the natural sciences. In truth, this theory was, as I will attempt to show, the first of the new human sciences to emerge from World War I knowledge.¹³

The lightning-fast development of military breathing apparatuses (in the vernacular: linen gas masks) shows that troops were having to adapt to a situation in which human respiration was assuming a direct role in the events of war. Before long the gas mask would find in Fritz Haber its celebrated father. We are informed in works on military history

13. For more on the emergence of an objective nephology at the beginning of the 19th century see Richard Hamblyn’s monograph *The Invention of Clouds: How an Amateur Meteorologist Forged the Language of the Skies*, New York: Picador, 2001. The most important derivatives produced by the human sciences on the basis of the phenomenon of war propaganda, and their abolition in totalitarian mass communication, can be found in Hermann Broch’s theory of collective madness. See below, p. 97.

that from February to June 1916 nearly five and a half million such gas masks, along with 4300 oxygen breathing apparatuses (first used in the mining industry), and two million liters of oxygen were distributed by the field depot to German troops at Verdun alone.¹⁴ These numbers show just how much this new “ecologized” war, this battle conducted in the atmospheric environment, was about conquering the respiratory “potentials” of hostile parties. The opponent’s biological weaknesses had been factored into the fight. The rapid popularization of the gas mask concept manifests the efforts of those subject to attack to try to shake their dependency on their immediate milieu, the breathable air, by concealing themselves behind an air filter. This involved a first step towards the principle of air conditioning, whose basic idea consists in disconnecting a defined volume of space from the surrounding air. On the offensive side, such developments were countered by escalating aggression with the use of toxins able to penetrate enemy respirators. In the summer of 1917, German chemists and officers first employed a chemical warfare agent called diphenylchloroarsine, known as “Blaukreuz” (Blue Cross) or Clark I, a suspended particle matter of the finest dust capable of infiltrating the adversary’s breathing apparatus, for which its victims dubbed it the “mask breaker.” At the same time, German gas artillery units on the Western Front introduced a revolutionary new gas agent called “Gelbkreuz” (Yellow Cross) or

14. Cf. Martinetz, *Der Gas-Krieg 1914–1918*, p. 93.

sulfur mustards¹⁵ in their battles against British troops, a substance which even in tiny amounts produces devastating consequences to the organism upon skin or mucous membrane contact, causing blindness and catastrophic nervous dysfunction in particular. Among the famous mustard gas or Ypérite victims on the Western Front was a certain Corporal Adolf Hitler, who, on a hill south of Ypres near Wervick (La Montagne) on the night of October 13, 1918, was caught in one of the last British-launched gas attacks of the First World War. In his memoirs, Hitler states that by the morning of the 14th his eyes felt as if they had been turned into glowing coals. Following the German capitulation on November 9th (which he witnessed as a rumor in the Pomeranian military hospital in Pasewalk) he suffered a relapse of mustard gas-blindness and in this state of crisis resolved “to become a politician.” Later, in spring 1944, with defeat imminent, he confided to Speer that he was afraid of going blind again as he had back then. Right to the end nervous traces of the gassing trauma stayed with him. Among the determining elements of the Second World War one particular fact appears to have played a role from the point of view of military technics: in

15. Fritz Haber named it “Lost” after the scientists in charge of the project, Dr. Lommel (Bayer, Leverkusen) and Prof. Steinkopf (of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Physical Chemistry and Electrochemistry in Berlin-Dahlem, known during the war as the “Prussian Military Institute”). This gas agent was also variously called “mustard gas” on account of its odor, “*Hunnenstoff*” (“Hun agent”) for its lethal properties, or *Ypérite* after the place it was first employed.

the wake of these incidents, Hitler brought with him an idiosyncratic understanding of gas into his personal concept of war, on the one hand, and into his idea of the practice of genocide, on the other.¹⁶

From its inception, gas warfare combined all three of the 20th century's operative criteria—terrorism, design consciousness, and environmental approach—into a densely interconnected whole. Indeed, as we have seen, the precise sense of the word terrorism presupposes an explicit concept of the environment, the reason being that terror involves the displacement of destructive action from the “system” (here: the enemy's body) onto his “environment”—in the case at hand: the air milieu in which enemy bodies move, subject to their own breathing reflex. This is why terrorist acts always have an assailing (*attentäterisch*) character about them. Because not only does an attack (Latin: *attentatum*, attempt, killing assay) by definition entail a surprising, malicious ambush, but also the malign exploitation of the victim's life-sustaining habits. The attack on humans in gas warfare is about integrating the most fundamental strata of the biological conditions for life into the attack: the breather, by continuing his elementary habitus, i.e. the necessity to breathe, becomes at once a victim

16. For more on the non-employment of gas weapons during World War II, see Günther Gellermann, *Der Krieg, der nicht stattfand. Möglichkeiten, Überlegungen und Entscheidungen der deutschen Obersten Führung zur Verwendung chemischer Kampfstoffe im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Koblenz: Bernard & Graefe Verlag, 1986.

and an unwilling accomplice in his own annihilation. That is, of course, assuming that the gas terrorist succeeds in immersing the victim in the unbreathable environment long enough to deliver the inevitable, deadly inhalations. So not only is it the case that, as Jean-Paul Sartre remarked, desperation is man's attack against himself; more: the gas terrorist's assault on the air induces desperation in those attacked, who, unable to refrain from breathing, are forced to participate in the obliteration of their own life.

With the phenomenon of gas warfare, the fact of the living organism's immersion in a breathable milieu arrives at the level of formal representation, bringing the climatic and atmospheric conditions pertaining to human life to a new level of explication. In this movement of explication the principle of design is implicated from the start, since to enable the operational manipulation of gas milieus in open terrain, requires making certain "atmotechnic" innovations. It is these latter that turned the development of chemical war clouds into a product-design-type task. Combatants deployed as regular soldiers on both the Eastern and Western gas fronts found themselves faced with the problem of how to establish new routines for the development of atmoterrorism in accordance with precise rules of art—a sort of regional atmospheric design. The artificial installation or fabrication of toxic particle clouds demanded the efficient coordination of cloud-forming factors such as concentration, diffusion, sedimentation, coherence characteristics, mass, extension and movement—as it were, a whole black meteorology dealing

with “precipitation” of a special kind. One of the strongholds of this particular brand of knowledge was the Fritz Haber-led Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Physical Chemistry and Electrochemistry in Berlin-Dahlem, one of the 20th century’s most ominous, still undepleted theory-addresses, which was rivaled by analogue institutions on the French and British sides. Now, to achieve the necessary field combat concentration of a chemical agent usually required an admixture of various stabilizers. However, thanks to the revelatory discovery of targeted, poison-cloud production over a defined but necessarily vague—because outdoors—area, the question of whether these poisonous precipitations were delivered in a hail of gas grenades from the front lines or by means of wind-supported, gas cylinder “discharge” was a relatively minor technicality. During a German gas artillery attack using Green Cross-diphosgene near Fleury on the Meuse on the night of June 22, 1916, it was estimated that for lethal cloud consistency in open terrain at least fifty howitzer shots or one hundred mortar rounds per hectare a minute were required—but the levels were not quite reached, which is why the French had a “mere” 1600 gas casualties and 90 deaths to mourn on the field the next morning.¹⁷ More decisive, however, is the fact that, by means of gas terrorism, modern technics crossed over into the design of the non-objective—it came to include the explication of latent topics such as physical air quality, artificial atmosphere additives, and other

17. Cf. Martinecz, *Der Gas-Krieg 1914–1918*, p. 70.

factors of climate creation for places of human-dwelling. It is precisely this process of progressive explication that binds terrorism with humanism. The future Nobel Prize-winner, Fritz Haber, claimed to have been an ardent patriot and humanist all his life. In his quasi-tragic farewell letter to his Institute on October 1, 1933, he declares the pride with which he worked for the Fatherland during times of war, and for humanity in times of peace.

Terrorism, from an environmental perspective, voids the distinction between violence against people and violence against things: it comprises a form of violence against the very human-ambient “things” without which people cannot remain people. By using violence against the very air that groups breathe, the human being’s immediate atmospheric envelope is transformed into something whose intactness or non-intactness is henceforth a question. In other words: air and atmosphere—the primary media for life, in both the physical and metaphorical sense—only became an object of explicit consideration and monitoring in domains such as aero-technics, medicine, law, politics, aesthetics and cultural theory in response to their terrorist deprivation. In this sense air and climate theory ought not be seen as the mere sediments of war and post-war science, and *eo ipso* in their inception topics of a peacetime science that would only develop in the shadows of war stress¹⁸: it is rather the case that

18. For more on the concept of “stress shadows” see Heiner Mühlmann, *The Nature of Cultures. A Blueprint for a Theory of Culture Genetics*, Vienna and New York: Springer, 1996.

they are the primary forms of a post-terrorist knowledge. This description already goes toward explaining why to date this kind of knowledge has established itself only in unstable, incoherent and authority-weak contexts; otherwise put, the notion that there can be genuine “terror” experts is in itself hybrid. While terrorism is always interpreted by its protagonists as a counterattack, its witnesses and victims always like to see it as being dealt and done with. Whence the reason that there is no chance either of engaging in a straightforward study of the “objects” in question or of having total immunity from unwarranted impositions of partisanship.

Misjudging the nature of terrorism is something that both professional terrorism fighters and analysts show a remarkable interest in doing at a high level—a phenomenon clearly evidenced by the helplessly elaborate flood of expert commentary after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The general thrust of virtually every comment about these attacks on the pre-eminent institutions of the USA was that the incidents had surprised not only US citizens but people throughout the world, and yet that they confirmed the notion that there are some things against which you just can’t protect yourself well enough. Not once in the American television broadcasters’ monotonous “War on Terror” campaign (whose terminology complied to Pentagon-issued directives) did anyone mention the basic fact that terrorism is not an opponent but a *modus operandi*, a fighting method that

immediately spreads to both sides of the conflict—which is why “War on Terrorism” is a nonsense phrase.¹⁹ The moment we bracket out the rule of war, i.e., taking sides, and abide by the rule of the peace process, i.e., listening to the other side, it becomes evident that no singular act of terror ever constitutes an absolute beginning. There is no terrorist *acte gratuit*, no “let there be terror.” Every terrorist attack sees itself as a counterattack in a series allegedly always started by the enemy. As a result, terrorism conceives itself in an “anti-terrorist” fashion. And this goes even for the “primal scene” on the Ypres front in 1915, since not only did it result in an immediately predictable sequence of counterstrikes and counter-counterstrikes, but, on the German side, it could actually be truthfully claimed that the French and British had used gas munitions first.²⁰ Terror, in its origin, is not an isolated, one-sided attack; it denotes the willingness and readiness of partners in conflict to operate in an expanded zone of warfare. **By means of this expansion in combat zones, the principle of explication emerged in the art of warfare: the enemy became an object in the environment whose removal was vital to the system’s survival.**

19. What is, however, by no means nonsense is the organization of measures of a policing, and even military, nature against specific groups committed to the use of violence in the mode of an attack against symbols, institutions, and individuals.

20. The chlorine gas attack at Ypres was no absolute premiere, not even for the Germans; so-called T12 gas grenades were tested on the Eastern front as early as January 1915 and employed on the Western front at Nieuport the following March.

Terrorism is the maximal explication of the other from the point of view of his exterminability.²¹

Stabilizing a working knowledge of terror is not solely a matter of recalling each of its practices in detail; it involves articulating the basic principles underlying the terrorist act in its technical explicitness and ongoing explication since 1915. Terrorism can only be understood when grasped as a form of exploration of the environment from the perspective of its destructibility. It exploits the fact that ordinary inhabitants have a user relationship to their environment, that they instinctively and exclusively consume it as a silent condition of their existence. In this instance, destruction assumes a more analytical character than use; while intermittent, scattered terror takes advantage of the harmlessness in differential between the attack and the undefended target; ongoing, systemized terror, on the contrary, breeds a prolonged climate of fear, placing defenders in a permanent state of readiness against attacks they are helpless to counter. Because of this, a terrorist-charged fight increasingly turns into a competition for explicative advantage over the weak points in the enemy's environment. [New weapons of terror are those through which the basic means of survival are made more explicit; new categories of attack are those which expose—in the mode of a bad surprise—new surfaces of vulnerability. A terrorist is

21. Exterminism constitutes a simplification of sadism as classically described by Sartre. No longer a mere question of usurping the other's freedom, it is primarily concerned with freeing one's own environment from the freedom of others.

anyone who gains an explicative advantage over the implicit conditions of the enemy's life and exploits it for the act. That is the reason why when large terrorist interventions occur one may feel that they foreshadow the future. The future lies with that which breaks open the implicits and transforms the harmless into a combat zone.]

Against this background, it is essential to bear in mind that all terrorism, in its very procedural principle, is generated by atmoterrorist means. Terrorism takes the form of an assault on the enemy's acute environmental living conditions, starting with a poison attack on the human organism's most immediate environmental resource: the air he breathes. In this it can be seen that what—since 1789 and even more so since 1915—has been known as *la Terreur* and more generally as terror were, with naïve brutality and insidious cunning, already anticipated in the various other modes of inflicting violence on the lifeworld conditions of human existence—one thinks here of the poisoning of drinking water, examples of which can already be found in antiquity, of contamination attacks on defended fortresses, of assault troops torching and smoking out cities and shelters, of spreading horror stories and the like. All the same, such comparisons miss the essential point. **For it is crucial to insist on identifying terrorism as a child of modernity, insofar as its exact definition was forged only after the principle of attacking an organism's, or a life-form's, environment and immune defenses was shown in its perfect technical explication.** And this first came to pass, as mentioned above, on April 22, 1915 when the contents of

5700 gas cylinders were released in a light wind blowing from Bixschoote to Langemarck, taking with it a chlorine gas cloud from the German lines to the French trenches. In the evening hours of that day, a hand jumped on the clock of ages, marking the end of the vitalistic, late-Romantic modernist phase and the beginning of atomterrorist objectivity. No caesura of equal profundity has occurred on this terrain since. All the great disasters of the 20th century, like those of the early twenty-first, belong without exception to the history of explication, begun that same April day on the Western front as French-Canadian troops, surprised by the whitish-yellow gas cloud creeping over them from the northeast, fled the front-line in panic, coughing and screaming in retreat.

After November 1918, the forms of technical explication that had been developed through wartime knowledge about the climatology of combat continued almost as a matter of course to be developed through their “peaceful use.” With the war drawing to its end, battle-seasoned Berliner chemists set their sights on bed bugs, the common mosquito, flour moths, and lice in particular. They were clearly unwilling to let the Versailles Treaty, which banned the production of warfare agents on German soil, spoil their fascination with their profession. At a conference in September 1918 at the German Society for General and Applied Entomology in Munich, Professor Ferdinand Flury (one of Fritz Haber’s closest colleagues at the Institute in Dahlem) gave a programmatic lecture on “Ordinary Pest Control Activities at the Kaiser

Wilhelm Institute for Physical Chemistry and Electrochemistry in Berlin Dahlem.” In the ensuing discussion, Haber reported on the work of his own “Technical Committee for Pest Control” (TASCH), a group primarily dedicated to introducing hydrogen cyanide gas (HCN) into the German agriculture industry for use as an insecticide, stating that: “The basic idea is to also make other substances used in the war, not only hydrogen cyanide, useful for pest control in the interest of promoting agriculture once peace is restored.”²² In his paper, Flury also pointed out that the “percentages used for the fumigation of insects or moths are very different to those inhaled through mammalian lungs, though the toxic effect parallels those for higher-order animals.”²³ Early in 1920, a journal for the “Technical Committee for Pest Control” (TASCH) founded shortly before the war’s end reported that the so-called tub procedure had been used, since 1917, to gas approximately 20 million cubic meters of “building space in mills, ships, barracks, military hospitals, schools, grain and seed silos” and similar areas meeting the criteria for the use of advanced hydrogen cyanide technology. By 1920, Flury and others had even developed and introduced another gas product that preserved the advantages of hydrogen cyanide—its extreme toxicity—but without the added

22. Quoted in Jürgen Kalthoff and Martin Werner, *Die Händler des Zyklon B. Tesch & Stabenow. Eine Firmengeschichte zwischen Hamburg und Auschwitz*, Hamburg: VSA Verlag, 1998, p. 24.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

disadvantages: namely, the gas's treacherous imperceptibility, or its inability to be detected through scent, taste, or other human senses. The secret ingredient of this novelty was a ten percent (later less) admixture of a highly effective gas irritant (methyl chloroformate) to the toxic hydrogen cyanide. The new product was brought onto the market as Zyklon A and recommended for the "disinfestation of insect-contaminated living areas." What is remarkable about Zyklon A is the fact that as a designer gas it exemplarily demonstrates one of the main features of design-related tasks, i.e. the re-introduction to user perception of imperceptible or already screened-out product functions: because the main compound component, hydrogen cyanide, evaporates at 27 degrees Celsius and is not immediately noticeable to humans, developers thought it wise to add a highly perceptible irritant component with a repellent effect to alert users to the substance's presence. (Philosophically, one could speak of a rephenomenalization of the aphenomenal.)²⁴ Let us note that the first *Großraumentwesung* (large area disinfestation) was carried out almost two years to the day after the attack at Ypres with a mill fumigation in Heidingsfeld, near Würzburg on April 21, 1917; only eighty-five years had passed between Goethe's death and Goebbels' introduction of the word "Großraumentwesung"

24. Considering that such an additive would have been counter-productive for the process of exterminating human beings, the hygiene services of Auschwitz, Oranienburg and other camps were supplied with a variant of Zyklon B without the warning substance. Cf. Kalthoff and Werner, *Die Händler des Zyklon B*, p. 162f.

into the German language; after this, the vocabulary of Germans, who were now in full possession of the chemical capabilities to eliminate animal pests, also came to be enriched by the concepts “Entmottung” (“demothization”) and “Entrattung” (“deratization”). Indeed, the owner of the mill made it known that his business remained completely “moth free” well after fumigation.

Civilian hydrogen cyanide cloud production was almost exclusively carried out in enclosed structures (with the exception of outdoor fruit trees, which were covered with tarps before fumigation). By such means, it was possible to work with high-enough levels of concentration to allow the providers of these services to boast that, thanks to hydrogen cyanide’s ability to get into every single nook and cranny, they were totally able to eradicate local insect populations, including even their nits and eggs. In the early phases of these practices, the relationship between the special, contaminated air zone, that is the volume of space to be fumigated, and the general air, or public atmosphere, was deemed so unproblematic that fumigations usually ended with a so-called ventilation—otherwise said: the poisonous gas was released into the surrounding air until “safe levels” of the gas were restored (a measure that in the beginning no scientist thought to take). The fact that the ventilation of the first area entailed polluting the second caused almost no one any concern at the time. The negligible proportion of the volume of the fumigated interior spaces relative to the non-fumigated outdoors appeared to be *a priori* and fixed for all time. In the

early forties, the industry's technical literature stated, not without pride, that one and a half million kilograms of hydrogen cyanide had been used to "disinfest" as many as 142 million cubic meters of space—or we should say: it was carelessly dumped into the atmosphere. After further progression and the development of environmental awareness, zones emerged in which this relationship between the surrounding air and the contaminated air zone became inverted. In other words, artificially created—or we might now say: the air-conditioned—zones emerged which provided privileged air conditions relative to the general surroundings, which themselves were subject to increasing breathing risks, sometimes to the point of acute unbreathability and chronic unlivability.

During the 1920s, a number of North German pest control services routinely used Zyklon gas for ships, warehouses, housing blocks, barracks, railroad cars and similar spaces—in 1924, one of them, the newly founded Hamburg company Tesch & Stabenow (Testa), patented a lead-product, Zyklon B, which would soon become a household name.²⁵ That one of the company's two founders, Dr. Bruno Tesch—born 1890, sentenced to death before a British military court in the Curio-Haus in 1946, and executed in the Hameln penitentiary—was employed from 1915 to 1920 at Fritz Haber's chemical weapons institute and involved with gas warfare development from the beginning, is a concrete testament to

25. Cf. Kalthoff and Werner, *Die Händler des Zyklon B*, *op cit.*, pp. 56–57 and 241.

the otherwise hugely significant personal and factual continuity of the new disinfection practices, beyond the concerns of war or peace. The advantage of Zyklon B, which Dr. Walter Heerdt either invented or developed, was that the highly volatile cyanide was absorbed by porous, dry carrier substances such as celite, radically improving the substance's storage and transport properties with respect to the earlier liquids. It entered the market in 200g, 500g, 1kg and 5kg canisters. From the 1930s, the product Zyklon B—which was first exclusively produced in Dessau (and later also in Kolin) and cooperatively distributed by the company Testa and the German Society for Pest Control—had already attained a quasi-monopoly on the world insecticide market, a position rivaled only by an older sulfur fumigation method for gassing ships.²⁶ At this time, a practice was introduced for obliterating vermin in fixed or mobile demoting or “extermination chambers,” whereby the material to be treated, usually rugs, uniforms and textiles of all kinds, as well as upholstered furniture, was brought into the gas room and then aired out.

With the onset of war in 1939, the Testa company gave disinfection seminars to civilians and *Wehrmacht* personnel in the East, a prominent feature of which were the gas chamber demonstrations. Just as before, delousing the troops and prisoners of war was considered one of the most imperative duties of pest control technicians on the hygiene front. Around 1942, the Tesch & Stabenow company published a

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 45–102.

brochure called *The Little Testa Handbook On Zyklon* for their customer base, which at the time featured the Eastern *Wehrmacht* and *Waffen-SS*. The booklet gave clear indications for militarizing the “extermination procedure”—including even the possible (re-)use of cyanide on human environments. In this vein, it states that the extermination of vermin “...not only adheres to one of the commandments of wisdom, it even goes so far as to constitute an act of self-defense!”²⁷ From a medical viewpoint, this can be read as a reference to the outbreak of a typhus epidemic on the Ostheer in 1941, which had killed more than ten percent of all those infected—in fact such a figure was already something of a triumph for German hygiene, given that the usual mortality rate for this illness was thirty percent (the typhus virus *Rickettsia prowazekii* is transmitted by clothing lice). In light of the above events, the *terminus technicus* “self-defense” shows that a potential rapprochement between gassing technology and the domain of human objects had already been mapped out on a semantic level. It would be a matter of mere months before it became obvious that the atmotechnic form of organism extermination was also going to be applied to human matter. In 1941 and 1942, several articles were written by the company’s in-house chemistry historians to mark the 25th anniversary of hydrogen cyanide in the fight against vermin as a relevant event for the entire cultured world; the authors did not yet realize the

27. *Ibid.*, p.109.

extent of the significance that their opportunistic hyperboles would take on in the diagnostic determination of the broader civilizational context.

If the year 1924 plays an eminent role in the drama of atmosphere explication, it is not solely because it is the year in which the Hamburg Zyklon-B company Tesch & Stabenow was founded; it is also the very same year in which the atmoterrorist theme of exterminating an organism by the acute destruction of its environment was passed into law in a democratic body politic. On February 8, 1924 the first “civilian” gas chamber was put into operation in the American state of Nevada—eleven other US states followed suit, including California, which was famous for its two seat, crypt-like octagonal gas chamber at the San Quentin State Prison and later infamous after the possible judicial gas murder of Caryl Chessman on May 2, 1960. The legal basis for the new execution method had been previously laid out in March 1921 by the State of Nevada. The first prisoner executed using the new method was the 29-year-old, Chinese-born Gee Jon, found guilty of the murder of fellow Chinese immigrant Tom Quong Kee (in the context of the early 1920s California gang war). In the American gas chambers delinquents were killed upon inhaling hydrogen cyanide fumes produced by pouring the toxic elements into a vessel. Just as military chemical research had discovered and shown on the field, this gas hinders oxygen transport in the blood, causing internal asphyxiation.

In the last years of World War I, the international community for poison gas and atmosphere design experts was porous enough, on both sides of the Atlantic, to be able to react to technical innovations and fluctuations in the climate of applied morality. With the building of the Edgewood Arsenal near Baltimore—an enormous, heavily-funded war research facility erected after entry into the war in 1917—the United States had availed themselves of their own academic-military-industrial complex, one which allowed for far closer cooperation between their respective weapons-development departments than those of their European counterparts. Edgewood became one of the birthplaces of teamwork—to be outclassed only by the “dream team” at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, which worked tirelessly on nuclear weapons extermination as if in a meditation camp. Even for the Edgewood teams of scientists, officers and entrepreneurs, however, the subsiding war conjuncture post-1918 made it necessary to turn toward research into civilian forms of survival. D. A. Turner first served during the war as a Major in the U.S. Army Medical Department Corps before becoming the creator of the Nevada State Prison gas chamber in Carson City; his peacetime efforts essentially consisted in applying his knowledge of the military deployment of hydrogen cyanide to civilian executions. By comparison with its outdoor use, the utilization of lethal gas in chambers had the advantage of eliminating the problem of lethal gas concentration—poison cloud design then came to take a backseat to chamber design. Even so, that the relationship between chamber and cloud can also be difficult to control has

meanwhile been demonstrated not only in gas chamber executions in the US; the very uneven course of the Sarin attacks on several Tokyo subway lines on March 20, 1995 also showed that it is rather difficult to produce the ideal empirical conditions for a controlled relation between poison gas and spatial volume.²⁸ This is just as true for assassins with a less unprofessional approach than the members of the Aum Shin-rikyo Sect, whose method consisted in placing their prepared, newspaper-wrapped sarin plastic bags on the floor of the subway car, perforating them with the filed metal spikes of their umbrellas just before the approaching stop, and then exiting to leave the continuing passengers to inhale the exuding poison.²⁹

What has assured Nevada justice a place in the history of the explication of human atmosphere-dependency was its sensitivity, at once foresightful and canny, to the modern qualities of gas death. In this field, “modern” can be defined as that which promises to combine a high level of efficiency with a sense of humanity—in the case at hand, through the use of a quick-acting poison administered to delinquents. Major Turner expressly recommended his chamber as a milder alternative to the already notorious electric chair, which burns the

28. The combat gas sarin (T 144) was developed in the Research Department of I.G. Farben led by Dr. Gerhard Schrader in 1938. It is more than three times as poisonous as hydrogen cyanide; with sufficient exposure time, one gram of sarin is enough to kill up to one thousand people.

29. Cf. Haruki Murakami, *Underground. The Tokyo Gas Attack & The Japanese Psyche*, London: Vintage, 2001.

delinquent's brain by passing strong electric currents through a tightly-fitting cap. The concept of gas execution shows that the effect of rendering things explicit is not unique to war; the same effect indeed also frequently follows from simple humanism, which has been America's spontaneous philosophy since the mid-nineteenth century, and whose academic version takes the name of pragmatism. In its desire to combine the most painless with the most effective, this manner of thinking refused to be troubled by the execution protocols suggesting that gas chamber delinquents had actually been subject to unprecedented forms of torture—some of the descriptions are actually so drastic as to indicate that, under the pretext of humanism, medieval torture executions made a comeback in the United States during the 20th century. For public perception, however, it was necessary that gas death be regarded, until proof to the contrary, as a procedure as practical as it was humane; in this respect, the Nevada gas chamber was one of pragmatic humanism's cult sites. Its construction was dictated by the sentimental law of the moderns, which states that public space ought to be kept free of open displays of personal cruelty. Nobody has stated as succinctly as Elias Canetti the constraint to which the moderns adhered, that of occulting the cruel features of their own actions: "The sum total of sensitivity in culture has become very great... Today it would be harder to condemn a man publicly to be burnt at the stake than to unleash a war."³⁰

30. Elias Canetti, *The Conscience of Words. Essays*. Trans. Joachim Neugroschel, New York: Seabury Press, 1979, p. 13.

The innovative idea in penal technology underlying the execution gas chamber presumes complete control over the difference between the deadly climate of the chamber inside and that of the climate outside—this motif even led to the building of glass walls in execution cells to enable those invited to witness gas executions and see the efficiency of the chamber’s interior atmospheric conditions for themselves. In this way, a kind of ontological difference became spatially installed at a short distance—with a deadly climate in the clearly defined, scrupulously sealed “cell,” and a convivial climate in the “lifeworld” area of executors and observers; being (*Sein*) and being-able-to-be (*Seinkönnen*) on the outside, beings (*Seiende*) and not-able-to-be (*Nichtseinkönnen*) on the inside. In the given context, being an “observer” means essentially to be an “observer of agony,” one vested with the privilege of watching the fall of an organic “system” from outside by making his “environment” unlivable. In the German concentration camps executioners were able to exercise the observer privilege by virtue of the fact that many gas chamber doors also came equipped with glass windows.

If the point is to conceive the administration of death as a product in the strictest sense, and therefore as a rendering-explicit of the procedures that result in the presence of corpses, then the gas chamber in Nevada—even if its use and replication in numerous other US states remained sporadic (the Carson City chamber was used 32 times between 1924 and 1979)—constitutes a milestone of rational exterminism in the 20th century. In 1927, when Heidegger spoke in *Being*

and Time, with the convolutedness proper to fundamental ontology, of the existential feature of being-unto-death, American corrections officers and execution doctors had already brought a machine into operation to turn breathing-unto-death into an ontically controllable procedure. No longer was it a question of “advancing” to one’s own death, but more so of ensnarement in the lethal trap of air.

The intention here is not to retrace the documentary and narrative details of how the two ideas of gas chambers that had co-existed since the 1930s ended up merging together. For our purposes, it suffices to indicate that there was a theater, or processor, for this fusion, namely the SS-intelligentsia, which, on the one hand, was receiving advice from the German pest control industry, and, on the other, had been granted every authorization to use “extraordinary” means thanks to the mandate the Berlin Chancellery had handed it, i.e. Hitler’s recent passing of a resolution to press ahead with a “final solution to the Jewish question,” which, after receiving an orally communicated secret “command,” became the top-priority mission for select SS-units as of the summer of 1941. Vested with this mission, which left great latitude for personal initiative, they embarked on a crazed, duty-inspired rampage. There were two catalysts by which ideas of pest extermination and the execution of human beings with hydrogen cyanide became connected: first, the systematic killing of prisoners-of-war with motor exhaust (in camps such as Belzec, Chelmno and others); and second,

the extensive killing of patients in German psychiatric institutions using gas showers in mobile gas chambers mounted on trucks.

At this relatively late stage in the process of explicating background atmospheric realities by means of a technology-bolstered terrorism, the Hitler-factor marks a point of escalation. There can hardly be any doubt that, after 1941, it was through the metaphors of “pests” and “vermin” that the most extreme exterminist intensification of German “Jewish policy” was propagated; having been a constitutive element of the Hitler-forged Nazi party rhetoric since the early twenties, after 1933 they also became a sort of official rule of language for a subjugated German public. The pseudo-normalizing effect of the expression *Volksschädling* (“public nuisance”: a term covering a vast semantic domain, including defeatism, black marketeering, anti-Führer jokes, criticizing the system, and a lack of belief in the future) helped contribute to the success with which leaders of the National Socialist Movement managed, if not to generalize their excessively idiosyncratic form of anti-Semitism as a typically German form of supposed hygiene, then at least to make it widely tolerable or imitable. At the same time, vermin and parasite metaphors also featured in the rhetorical arsenal of Stalinism, which developed *the* most comprehensive policy of camp terror, but without reaching the exterminative extremes practiced by the SS. The acting-out of the metaphor of “pest control” stood unmistakably at the core of the gas chamber and crematorium industry in Auschwitz and other

concentration camps. The expression *Sonderbehandlung* (special treatment) designated essentially the direct application of insect extermination procedures to human populations. The practical realization of this metaphoric operation went to the lengths of applying the most common “de-entifying” substance, Zyklon B, as if it was a matter of executing, in fanatical analogy, the chamber procedure that came to be used in many places. By virtue of their extreme pragmatism, the executors’ psychotic acting-out of a metaphor and thorough implementation of official measures went off together practically without a hitch.

Research on the holocaust has rightly recognized that the defining characteristic of the industry at Auschwitz lay precisely in this fusion of running “amok” and routine. That, according to witness accounts, Zyklon B was often brought into the camp in Red Cross vehicles is similarly consistent with the hygienizing and medicalizing tendency of the “measures” as well as the need of the perpetrators to camouflage themselves. In 1941, a military doctor writing for the specialist journal “*Der praktische Disinfektor*” (The Practical Disinfector) described Jews as being almost the only “carriers of epidemic”—in the context of the time such a statement was almost conventional, however given the socio-political backdrop it amounted to a barely concealed threat. On November 2 of the same year, the Reich’s propaganda minister, Goebbels, wrote an aphoristic diary note, confirming the stability of this association between the entomological and political imaginaries: “The Jews are the lice of civilized

humanity.”³¹ The entry shows that Goebbels communicated with himself as though he were agitating a crowd. Like stupidity, evil is self-hypnotic.

In January 1942, two gas chambers were installed in a converted farmhouse (called Bunker I) on the Auschwitz-Birkenau grounds and “put into operation.” The need to expand capacity soon became clear and more facilities were constructed in rapid succession. On the night of March 13, 1943, a total of one thousand four hundred and ninety two Jews from the Krakow ghetto deemed “unfit for work” were gassed in Leichenkeller I of the Auschwitz Krematorium II; the use of 6 kilograms of Zyklon B was used to yield about 20 grams of hydrogen cyanide per cubic meter of air, which was exactly the concentration that Degesch had recommended for delousing. That summer, the cellar of Krematorium III was fitted with a gas-tight door and fourteen mock shower heads. Then, in early summer of 1944, further technical headway was made and Auschwitz was equipped with a Siemens-developed short-wave mechanism for delousing work clothes and uniforms. In November of the same year, the *Reichsführer SS*, Heinrich Himmler, ordered an end to gas killings. By that time, according to serious estimates at

31. Götz Aly, *“Final Solution”: Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews*, Trans. Belinda Cooper and Alice Brown, London: Arnold, 1999, p. 245. Hate speech statements of this kind have only very recently been adequately analyzed with regard to linguistics and moral philosophy. See for example Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, New York: Routledge 1997.

least three-quarters of a million people had fallen victim to the “treatments.” In the winter of 1944–1945, camp troops and prisoners set about eliminating all the traces of gas-terrorist installations prior to the arrival of Allied troops. And the employees at Dagesch (Frankfurt), Tesch & Stabenow (Hamburg), and Heerd-Lingler (Frankfurt), who had delivered their products to the camps knowing their intended use, deemed it necessary to destroy the records of all business transactions.

Increasing Explication

From the features of the atmoterrorist procedures of gas warfare (1915–1918) and genocidal gas extermination (1941–1945) the contours of a special climatology emerged. It was in this climatology that the active manipulation of breathing air first became a cultural matter, albeit in its most destructive dimension. This manipulation immediately had all the features of an act of design, one according to which “within the rules of art” human beings produce and design more or less precisely delimitable microclimata of death for other human beings. Valuable conclusions can be drawn from this “negative air conditioning,” since it sheds light on modernity as a process of atmosphere-explication. Indeed, atmoterrorism was what gave the areas of human dwelling in the natural and ancient “lifeworld” that were most resistant to the transition from traditional into modern conditions—those areas affording inhabitants and travelers in the air milieu a natural rapport to the atmosphere and an unquestionably given and anxiety-free, unproblematic being—the decisive push into modernization. The average human being-in-the-world—which is another name for the modern explication of the

ontological “situation” since the loss of old-world European certitudes—was previously a Being-in-the-air; or more exactly a Being-in-the-breathable. This was so deeply true and self-evident that arriving at a detailed thematization of air and atmospheric relations was practically impossible, apart from in poetic form or in physical and medical contexts,¹ but not by any means in the everyday relations of cultural participants, and still less in the definitions of their life forms. The possible exception to this are the greatly advanced intuitions of that precocious cultural critic Johann Gottfried Herder, who, in his inexhaustible *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity*, lay down axioms for a new science of “aerology” and for a general atmospherology. This science could also be called the study of the life-sheltering “air-sphere”: “For,” as Herder put it, “man is, like everything else, but a pupil of the air.” More, he exclaimed, if only at long last we were to have an academy in which to teach such disciplines, new light could be shed on the correlation between the cultured creature that is the human being and nature, and we would be in a position to “see this great hothouse of Nature operating a thousand changes by the same fundamental laws.”²

1. Cf. Wim Klever (ed.), *Die Schwere der Luft in der Diskussion des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Wiesbaden 1997; Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump. Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985; Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland *Makrobiotik*, 1796, underscores the connection between air quality and life expectancy. It is published in English as *The Art of Prolonging Life* Erasmus Wilson (ed.), Kessinger Publishing Co., 2003.

2. J.G.H., *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*, Trans. T. O. Churchill, New York: Bergman Publishers, 1800, p. 14. Translation modified.

These words again remind us of the role that Herder played in inspiring last century's wide-ranging anthropology; my aim here is not to cite him once again as the author of that precarious doctrine of man as *Homo Inermis*, but rather as the initiator of a theory of human cultures conceived as forms of organization of existence in greenhouses. However, even Herder's philanthropic anticipations, which plane in eutonic fashion above the nature/culture opposition, are unable to shed any light on the dialectical, or thematogenic, relation between terrorism and background explication. Even Nietzsche and his well-known hypersensitivity to everything related to life's climatic conditions, like air pressure, moisture, wind, clouds and quasi-immaterial tensions, also belong to the fading twilight of the old-European faith in nature and atmosphere, albeit in a subverted form. On the occasion of the 1881 Paris electricity exhibition, Nietzsche humorously wrote that, due to his abnormally atmosphere-sensitive constitution, he might actually be exhibited as a sort of a pataphysical tension measuring device.³ In fact, however, the real signification of air, climate, breathing milieu and atmosphere in micro and macro-climatological

3. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Briefe, Sämtliche Briefe*, Kritische Studienausgabe Vol. 6, Munich, 1986, p. 140. To Franz Overbeck, 14th November 1881: "This medical meteorology... is unfortunately a science still in its infancy and, with respect to my personal requirements, just a dozen question marks more. Perhaps we know more now—I should have been at the electricity exhibition in Paris, partly to learn the latest findings, partly as an object in the exhibition; for as one who senses electrical changes and as a so-called weather prophet I am a match for the monkeys and am probably a 'speciality.'"

terms—and more so in those of culture and media theory—could actually only emerge after the modalities and stages of the 20th century's exterministic-atmoterrorist practices were traversed—and it is in this light that it also becomes clear that the 21st century will give them new forms of expression.

Airquake: the explication of air, climatic and atmospheric situations calls into question the basic presumption of beings concerning their primary media of existence and convicts it of naivety. If, in their history to date, humans could step out at will under any given stretch of sky, in- or out-of-doors, and take for granted the unquestioned idea of the possibility of breathing in the surrounding atmosphere, then, as we see in retrospect, they enjoyed a privilege of naivety which was withdrawn with the caesura of the 20th century. Anyone who lives after this caesura and moves within a culture zone in step with modernity is already bound, whether in rudimentary or elaborated forms, to a formal concern for climate and atmosphere design. To show one's willingness to participate in modernity one is compelled to let oneself be seized by its power of explication over what once discretely under-"lay" everything, that which encompassed and enveloped to form an environment.

Before this new duty of care for the atmospheric and climatic became fully ingrained in later descendents, a few more steps had to be taken in the way of atmoterrorist explication. From a philosophical viewpoint, it is interesting here to note the development of the modern air force*; indeed its very

* Air Force in German is *Luftwaffe*, literally "weapon of the air." *Translator's note.*

name lays claim to a certain competence in matters of atmospheric intervention. What must be underscored is that the air force *per se* is a central phenomenon of the state form of atmoterrorism. Military airplanes essentially function, as missile artillery would also come to, as access weapons; they work to abolish the immunizing effects of spatial distance between army units; they force access to objects which are inaccessible from the ground, or accessible only with a high casualty-rate. They turn the question of whether or not combatants are natural neighbors into a second-order issue. Any account of war's globalization through tele-destructive systems must of necessity include the long-range explosions pelted down by the air force. Thanks to them the forms of exterminism peculiar to the 20th century might in large part be described as black meteorology. Or otherwise put: as 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.

From 1915 thru to 1945, practically all the manifestations of gas terrorism were waged as ground campaigns (with the exception of the 1922–1927 Rif War in Spanish Morocco, which stands as the first aero-chemical war campaign).⁴

4. Cf. Rudibert Kunz and Rolf-Dieter Müller, *Giffigas gegen Abd el Krim. Deutschland, Spanien und der Gaskrieg in Spanisch-Marokko 1922–1927*, Rombach: Freiburg 1990. This work provides precise details about the participation of German military chemists and firms in the first aero-chemical war, during which the cavalymen from the Kabyle mountain people of the Rif were attacked with mustard gas bombs and petrol bombs.

However, for technical and tactical reasons, practically all the thermo-terrorist and radiation-terrorist attacks on the enemy's lifeworlds have required air force operations—a phenomenon whose indisputable paradigms (subsequent to the shocking attacks on Guernica on April 27, 1937 and on Coventry during the night of November 15, 1940 by German warplanes) are the destruction of Dresden on February 13 and 14, 1945 by British bomber fleets and the August 6 and 9 obliteration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the dropping of two nuclear bombs from American fighter planes. Romantic notions of battle scenes between two equal military aircraft units, of jousts between “aerial knights,” might engross the imagination, but the historical importance of such scenes is only marginal. In truth, the *de facto* norm for “air battles” is the practice of one-sided, irreciprocable air strikes: either by means of precision attacks carried out on defined targets by individual aircraft or by carpet bombings from large air fleets, in analogy to the approximate logic of gas artillery: in an operative sense, near enough is as good as exact. Coined in the fourth decade of last century, the carpet bomb metaphor describes very precisely the image of overlaying large sections of cultivated and populated landscapes with a deadly wall-to-wall carpet. Examples of the area effects associated with punctual large-scale bombing include the demonstrative NATO air strikes on Serbia during the Kosovo conflict between March 24 and June 10, 1999. Although the function of the air force lends itself to a military-romantic interpretation and is discretely presented as a

neo-aristocratic discipline—as a quasi-continuation of the royal discipline of the artillery in a freer medium—the marked tendency from the standpoint of practice is their use as the weapon of choice for atmoterrorist campaigns. This is proof, then, that far from providing the antidote for terrorist practices, the statification of weaponry works towards their systematization. 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 normalization of the state-terrorist *habitus* and the ecologization of warfare.⁵ In this context, the anti-NATO demonstrations that were led by Serbian civilians, dressed as targets standing on Branko's Bridge over the Sava in early 1999, serve as an apposite commentary on the reality of air warfare in the 20th century.

Examples from the Second World War in Europe and in the Far East are not the only ones that bespeak the fact that state air forces conduct warfare through the general application of a *habitus* which we might call “attemptable”; for, in accordance with their *modus operandi*, air attacks nearly always assume the form of a surprise. Even when they are precision attacks against “installations,” air attacks always suppose a violation of the enemy's lifeworlds and *eo ipso* the

5. One sign of this among many is the US Air Force's use of manifest means, such as napalm, to combat terrorism in the Vietnam war, not to mention the dropping of the more notorious “lung breaking bomb,” the BLU 82 Commando Vault, nicknamed the Daisy Cutter (a 5.7 ton ammonium nitrate bomb), on Iraqi infantry and Afghani fighters.

risk of killing civilians; indeed, in the case of aerial area bombardment the latter actually becomes the primary intention. It is well-known that the generalized “terror bombing” over German Reich territory between 1943 and 1945 was not exclusively out to target military structures, but was primarily aimed at the country’s mental infrastructure; this is why it had to be so strenuously defended, on account of its morale-breaking effect, against the internal, and not uniquely pacifist, critiques coming from Allied circles.

The bombing of Dresden on the night of February 13, 1945 by two fleets of Lancaster bombers of the Royal Air Force relied on a pyrotechnic concept: the point was to surround the city center, a quarter-circle shaped sector, with a thick ring of high explosive- and firebombs and engulf the entire area inside it in an overall 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. The testing of an analogue concept for the systematic creation of firestorms had already been successfully performed by Air Marshall Arthur Harris in the bombing of Hamburg on July 27, 1943. For the repeat performance in Dresden in 1945, an initial bombardment between 10:13 and 10:28 pm was launched to set the stage, and a second wave of attack between 1:30 and 1:55 am consolidated it, fuelling the firestorm to the desired scale and spreading it across vast parts of the city, including also the refugee-packed area surrounding the central station. The third wave of bombs, delivered by

American squadrons, fell on an already ravaged city. An estimated 650,000 individual bombs were dropped during the first two attacks, circa 1500 tons of blockbusters and high-explosive bombs and about 1200 tons of firebombs, which were rained down in smaller, scattered lots to ignite the area fire.⁶ The high proportion of firebombs indicates that the primary objective was the destruction of residential areas and the annihilation of civilian lives. The attackers were aware that were their idea to run according to plan, it would—in a city already overburdened with refugees from the east—inevitably produce a high number of victims. That the plan was a success was shown, among other things, by the numerous corpses found inside the fire encircled area that were mummified and desiccated without having come into direct contact with the flames. Thanks to the stack effect, more than one hundred intact bomb shelters were transformed into fan-forced ovens, cooking their occupants alive. Prior to August 6, 1945 the history of applied horror had yielded no other example of “lifeworld” devastation covering an area almost as big as an entire city district by producing a sort of high-performance combustion chamber; inside the chamber the fire’s temperatures climbed to over a thousand degrees Celsius, its lethal effects being reinforced by toxic gases from the smoke. This production of a special atmosphere capable of

6. For a detailed account of the events between February 12th and 15th 1945, see Götz Bergander, *Dresden im Luftkrieg. Vorgeschichte, Zerstörung, Folgen*, Flechsig: Weimar, 1994, especially pp. 112–231.

burning, carbonizing, desiccating, and asphyxiating at least 35,000 people in the space of one night constituted a radical innovation in the domain of rapid, mass killings.⁷ Though it is possible to construe it as a contingent singularity of war, Dresden's night of fire actually constituted the new archetype for extensive thermoterrorism in the world. What occurred here was a thoroughly planned, large-scale attack on the thermal, limit conditions for life. It brought to pass the most explicit negation of the most implicit of all assumptions: that the human being's being-in-the-world cannot, under any circumstances, mean a being-in-the-fire.

One of the—no longer surprising—surprises of the 20th century is that this maximum also proved surpassable. The explication of the atmosphere by means of terror did not stop at the transformation of lifeworlds into fire and gas furnaces. Topping the horror of Churchill and Harris' furnace required no less than a worldview revolution or more precisely—since we now know the falsity of talk about revolution—a breakthrough in explicating the physical and biospheric latency holding the world together. Here, it is not a matter of going over the shared history of nuclear physics and nuclear weapons yet again. The crucial thing is to see that nuclear

7. For Götz Bergander, who was an eyewitness, the number of those proclaimed dead intuitively seemed too low. But as an historian he admits that there is no evidence to prove that the numbers were actually higher, even if such seems plausible from a subjective point of view and due to the extremeness of the dynamics.

physics' explication of radioactive material and the latter's public demonstration via mushroom clouds over arid test sites and populated cities, simultaneously opened a new level of the explication of those atmospheric elements of concern to human beings. With this they accomplished a "revolutionary" re-orientation of "environmental" consciousness, turning it toward the invisible milieu of radiation and waves. In consideration of this, all recourse to the classical clearing by which we have "life, movement, and being" is barred, irrespective of whether it is interpreted theologically or phenomenologically. The (post-)phenomenological gloss of the nuclear explosions over the deserts of Nevada and both Japanese cities reads: *Making radioactivity explicit*.

The dropping of atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki quantitatively exceeded the Dresden incident without question—the simultaneous obliteration of (according to the most conservative estimates)⁸ over one hundred thousand, and then forty thousand more, human lives can indeed be taken as the provisional culminating point of events connected to atomterrorist explication; in addition, however, the nuclear explosions of August 6 and 9, 1945 precipitated a simultaneous escalation, surpassing the dimension of thermoterrorism and inaugurating a shift to that of radioterrorism. The victims of heat that perished in Hiroshima

8. Adding to this figure the number of radiation victims deceased before the end of 1945, or before the first anniversary of the dropping of the bombs, we arrive at a figure of one hundred and fifty one thousand dead for Hiroshima and seventy thousand for Nagasaki.

and Nagasaki in the first seconds and minutes were soon joined—but also in countless cases with delays of years or decades—by the victims of radioactivity; what the latter victims made explicit is the fact that human existence is situated in a complex atmosphere of waves and radiation, a reality witnessable only as the appearance of certain indirect effects, but that is not immediately perceivable. The direct dumping of acute—and in the longer-term—lethal doses of radioactivity, released “after” the bombs’ primary thermic and kinetic effects, rudely awakened in witnesses and the wounded an awareness of a radically new dimension of latency. The long concealed, the unknown, the unconscious, the never-known, the never-noticed and the 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 visible burns of an invisible fire. The faces of survivors imaged a new form of apathy: “Hiroshima masks” stared out at the remains of a world that a light storm had removed from them only to restitute as a radioactive desert. These faces bespoke the scandal of Being taken to its dark limits. After black rain fell on Japan, this nameless evil manifested itself for decades through all sorts of cancers and profound psychic disturbances. US censors in Japan forbade all public mention of the two catastrophes until 1952.⁹

9. At the Peace Memorial Ceremony in Hiroshima on the 6th of August 2001 the total number of victims was estimated to be 221,893 individuals, including 123,000 men and 98,500 women.

These events manifest an increase in the dimension of terrorist action: for nuclear attacks on the enemy's life-world involve the terrorist use of latency as such. The imperceptibility of radioactive weapons becomes a critical part of weaponry's effects. Before the enemy would understand that he exists not merely in the air, but also in an imperceptible atmosphere of waves and radioactivity, it was necessary for radioactive contamination to occur. Like chemical extremism, nuclear extremism is a critical case of explication.

With the nuclear step of explication, phenomenal catastrophe is irrevocably also a catastrophe of the phenomenal. The advances of physicists and their instructed military personnel showed that something exists at the radioactive level of environmental influence, that there is something in the air that the children of the pre-nuclear age, that former humanity of "pupils of the air" who breathed serenely and with a naïve sensibility of context, were quite simply incapable of perceiving. From this rupture onwards, the need to perceive the imperceptible hung over them like a new law formed as a threat.

This redefined latency has also been the operative field of bio-terrorists (as also of their simulators and parasites) in both state and non-state contexts. Bio-terrorists incorporate the dimension of the "imperceptibly small" into their attack calculations, imperiling the enemy's environment with invisible aggressors. The most explicit advances in the field of bio-atmospheric terrorism in the 1970s and 80s were made

by Soviet military scientists; its primitive scenes include the 1982 and 1983 tuleramia virus experiments conducted on a restricted island in the Aral Sea, during which hundreds of specially-imported African apes were tied to posts and showered with newly developed tuleramia bombs. And the researchers were pleased with the results: despite having been vaccinated, nearly all of the test animals died shortly after inhaling the virus.¹⁰

If, in his post-1945 writings, Martin Heidegger makes recurrent use of the term *Heimatlosigkeit*, or absence of homeland, to signify the human being's existential orientation in the era of *Ge-Stell*, then we would be wrong to imagine he is merely talking about the bygone naivety of dwelling in rural houses and the moving of existence into urban habitation machines. More profoundly, the term "homeless" also suggests a denaturalization, in the sense of the human being's banishment from its natural air-envelope and re-settlement in climate-controlled spaces; more radically still, the discourse of homelessness can be read as symbolizing the change of epoch implied by the exodus out of all the remaining protective niches and into latency. After psychoanalysis, not even the unconscious is useable as a home, nor is "tradition" after modern art, nor by any

10. Ken Alibek and Stephen Handelman, *Biohazard: The Chilling True Story of the Largest Covert Biological Weapons Program in the World—Told from the Inside by the Man Who Ran It*, New York: Random Books, 1999, pp. 25–28

means “life” after modern biology. The spectrum of these post-Hiroshima breakthroughs toward an a-patrial existence involves the forced revelation of the atmosphere’s radio-physical and electro-magnetic dimensions, and, conditional thereupon, culture participants’ moving into radio-technology monitored forms of dwelling. At the height of the nuclear arms race between the US and Soviet Union in the 1970s, Physicist Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker (who was familiar with Heidegger’s work) raised a monument to this situation by conspicuously ordering the building of a nuclear bomb shelter in the garden of his house near Starnberg.

But Heidegger’s evocative discourse concerning man’s “dwelling” in a *Gegend*, as that which makes him possible and calls him forth, cannot be the last word on questions of existence under the constraint of explication and of its mission to give itself form. In exulting more certain forms of more reflected living in “surroundings,” the philosophy leaps illegitimately to espousing the ideal of a whole-making space that implicates both the old and the new.¹¹ For him, the *Gegend* is the name of a distinguished place, of which one cannot easily say how one might get there were one not there already; it is a place which explication skirts around, as though explication applied only elsewhere. It is a place

11. Cf. Werner Marx, “The ‘Sphere’ for the Measure Surmounting Subjectivism” in *Is there a Measure on Earth? Foundations for a Nonmetaphysical Ethics*. Trans. Thomas J. Nenon and Reginald Lilly, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, pp. 74–98.

that has been touched by the cold wind from outside, by the location risks of modernization, and yet it is still a place to call home. Everything happens as if its residents knew full well that the desert was advancing and yet, right where themselves found themselves, could still feel connected to a wondrously immunizing form of “space and duration.”¹² This vision, it could be said, is highly idyllic. But in spite of its provisional character and provincial connotations, the word *Gegend* still has an undeniably indicative force; it registers the therapeutic dimension of the art of space-building after the catastrophes through which explication was advanced.¹³ After all, in what does therapeutics consist if not in a knowledge of the processual and in the art of re-instituting measures more apposite to the human after the irruption of the immeasurable; if not in the development of a subtle architecture of living spaces after demos of the unlivable? My disagreements with Heidegger on this point, however, result from the conviction, born of historical experience and grounded theoretically in reflections on space, that the conditions for *Gegend* and natal-earth type situations cannot be construed as donations of Being, not even when they can be established in a local and revocable way; for they are actually dependent on sustained efforts of

12. Martin Heidegger, *Zur Erörterung der Gelassenheit. Aus einem Feldweggespräch über das Denken*, 1944–5, in *Gesammelte Werke* 13, p. 47.

13. In his doctrine of “embedding situations,” Hermann Schmitz bases himself on the positive content of the term “habitat”; cf. his *Adolf Hitler in der Geschichte*, Bonn 1999.

not curation;
but stewardship

formal design, technical production, legal trusteeship, and political design.¹⁴

With these references to the unfolding question (itself set into motion by gas warfare and reinforced by industrial smog and suchlike) of the conditions of breathable air, to the gas-terrorist and thermo-terrorist intensifications of World War II, and to the explosive revelation of human being-in-the-world's underlying radiological dimension—captured once and for all by the events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—we trace an historical arc of increasing explication in the problematization of human dwelling in gas and radiological milieus. A retrospective examination of the sort attempted here need by no means assume that the history of atmospheric explication ended with the perfecting of nuclear weapons during the Cold War. Indeed, the disappearance of the Soviet Union simply handed the sole remaining world power the monopoly over expanding the atmoterrorist continuum that had been elaborated between 1915–1990 in even more explicit and thereby more monstrous dimensions. The end of the Cold War may have brought with it a temporary lull in nuclear intimidation; but with respect to the integration of still undeveloped latent climatic, radiophysical, and neurophysiological dimensions into the explicit-making military projects of world power the 1990s

14. I deal with this subject in the chapter of *Sphären III* that is devoted to the theory of architecture and space. See *Schäume, Sphären III*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003.

rather marks the threshold of a new beginning. In these years a previously unthinkable leap in escalation was accomplished, largely unbeknownst to the public, in the possibilities of atmoterrorist intervention.

In a paper presented on June 17, 1996 (and authorized for public disclosure by the US Department of Defense despite the topic's sensitivity), seven officers from the Pentagon's scientific research division sketched the parameters of future ionospheric warfare. The project paper, entitled "Weather as a Force Multiplier: Owning the Weather in 2025," was drawn up in compliance with a directive from the Air Force Chief of Staff. The aim was to name the conditions under which the United States could affirm their role as the absolute air and space force by 2025. Its authors estimated that a thirty-year period of development would suffice to be able not only to control the ionosphere—as a component of the earth's external, physical biosphere that is imperceptible for humans—but also to make it useful militarily, notably through the discretionary generation and elimination of stormy weather conditions, ensuring the owner of the ionosphere weapon a "battlefield dominance." Based on current projections, the range of weather weapons will include: the maintaining or hindering of vision in air space; the increasing or decreasing the troops' comfort levels* (i.e. their morale); thunderstorm enhancement and modification; rainfall prevention over enemy territories and the inducing

* [In English in the original. *Translator's note.*]

of artificial drought; the intercepting and blocking of enemy communication; and preventing the enemy from performing analogous weather activities. These sorts of explications of new operative parameters for military interventions into the “battle-space environment” clearly show that the future state of “battlefield shaping” and “battlefield awareness” is already being taken into account. To this effect, the paper summary notes:

A high-risk, high-reward endeavor, weather-modification offers a dilemma not unlike the splitting of the atom. While some segments of society will always be reluctant to examine controversial issues such as weather-modification, the tremendous military capabilities that could result from this field are ignored at our own peril.

The authors thus make clear not only that they endorse developing such weapons regardless of whether it flies in the face of public opinion, but also that they form part of a cultural environment that is only capable of anticipating a single type war—US military conflicts against rogue or “go-it-alone” states that tolerate or support military or terrorist action against the complex of “Western” civilization. Only against this background could publicizing future meteorological weapons and embarking on a process of escalating atmoterrorist practices remain compatible with a cultural situation that is at once highly legally regulated and marked by an extreme sensitivity to the obligation of legitimation.

Built-in to the premises of weather weapons research is a stable, moral asymmetry between US acts of warfare and every potential non-US 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 most 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. The *American way of war* includes in advance the enemy's punishment, because vectors of armed hostility against the United States can only be presented as manifest criminals. In fact, this way of presenting things was also quite the norm in Cold War times, when Moscow was obstinately labeled "the world-base of all terrorism."¹⁵ Declaring war against an enemy thus gets replaced with the issuing of an arrest warrant. The interpretative authority to declare the fighter of a foreign cause a terrorist enables whoever holds it systematically to shift the perception of terror from the level of methods to that of the opposing group, and in doing so to remove oneself from the picture. Warfare thus becomes indissociable from an extra-judicial trial. The victor's anticipated justice comes to pass in the form of weapons research against the enemies of tomorrow and of the day after.

Beyond its declared interest in weather weapons, since 1993 the US has been working on an auroral research program,

15. Cf. John Berger, *The Sense of Sight*, New York: Random House, 1985, p.293.

or *High-frequency Active Auroral Research Program* (HAARP), from which the scientific and technological premises of a potential super-wave weapon might be derived. Advocates of the project emphasize its civilian character, for instance its potential ability to repair ozone layer damage and prevent hurricanes, while its—to date few—critics recognize this kind of information as typical of camouflage for top-secret military plans.¹⁶ The HAARP project is based at an enormous research facility in Gakona, South Central Alaska, approximately 300 kilometers northwest of Anchorage. At the facility, a large number of antennae produce high-energy electromagnetic fields and transmit them directly into the ionosphere. They generate a reflection and resonance effect that is reportedly designed to be able to focus these energy fields over any point on the earth's surface. This type of radiowave emission could possibly produce an energy artillery of practically unlimited efficacy. The installation's technical premises date back to the ideas of the inventor Nicola Tesla (1856–1943), who already alerted the US government to the military possibilities of a tele-energy weapon back in the 1940s. Such a system is hypothetically thought to be capable of producing violent physical effects, to the point of being able to unleash climate catastrophes and earthquakes in the targeted areas. Some observers have already attributed the erratic appearance of snowstorms and

16. Cf. Jeane Manning & Nick Begich, *Angels Don't Play This HAARP: Advances in Tesla Technology*, Earthpulse Press, 1996.

fog in Arizona and other inexplicable weather phenomena to the tests conducted at the Alaska base. However, because ELF (Extremely Low Frequency) or 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.¹⁷ Even on a speculative level, this type of weapon is clearly conceivable only on the proviso that there appears to be clear-cut present and enduring difference in moral level between the brains that are developing ELF waves and the brains to be fought with them. Even if it was non-lethal, this type of weapon could conceivably be used only against something that is purely and simply foreign, or against absolute evil and its human incarnations. However, it cannot be ruled out that such research endeavors will not entail moral complications ruinous for identifying this type of moral difference. When the distinction between rogue brains and non-rogue brains becomes too problematic, the production of a wave weapon against one side of this difference could have devastating self-referential effects for the other side—as we have already seen with atomic weapons.

The mention of such prospects might be thought to be surreal; but it is no more fanciful than the announcement of a gas weapon would have been prior to 1915 or of an

17. *Ibid.*, p. 231ff.

atomic weapon prior to 1945. Prior to their proven event, most people in the western hemisphere would have dismissed nuclear weapons as a kind of occultism in the guise of a natural science and deemed it completely implausible in the dimension of the real. The surreal effect of the real prior to its publication is a secondary effect of advancements in explication, which from the beginning have divided societies, on the one hand, into smaller groups of persons who, as thinkers, operators, and victims, participate in breakthroughs in explication, and, on the other, into another, much larger group, which remains, from the standpoint of the permission to dwell, in the implicit *ante eventum* and reacts to explication only *après coup*. Public hysteria is the democratic response to the explicit when it can no longer be denied.

Everyday dwelling in latency is more and more anxious. Two kinds of sleepers then start to appear: there are the sleepers in the implicit, those who continue to seek security in ignorance; and there are the sleepers in the explicit, those who are aware of what is planned on the front and await the call to action. Atomterrorist explication splits consciousness in one and the same cultural population (whether it is called the people or the population has long been a trifling matter) to such an extent that its inhabitants *de facto* cease to inhabit the same world and only constitute a common society in the form of the citizen. It turns some into collaborators of the explicit and by the same token agents of a structural terror on constantly shifting fronts, albeit one that is rarely active,

against the underlying conditions produced by nature and culture; while the others—who are turned into inner aborigines, regionalists, and the voluntary curators of their own untimeliness—try, on their reservations to maintain the benefits of having a fact-free concept of a world that is symbolically immune to the age of latency.]

Air/Condition

Of all aesthetic modernity's offensives, it was surrealism more than any other that honed the idea that the essential interest of the present consists in the explication of culture, provided we understand culture as the quintessence of symbol-generating and creative-art processes. Surrealism answers to the imperative of occupying the symbolic dimensions of the modernization campaign. Its avowed and unexplained objective is to make creative processes explicit and, wherever possible, to unlock technically their domain source. Without further ado, it brings the fetish of the age out into the open, the all-legitimizing concept of "revolution." But like in the political domain (where there was never any *de facto* "rotation," in the sense of a top to bottom inversion, but instead a proliferation of high-placed positions and their reoccupation by the representatives of the marauding middle classes—something that in reality has never been achieved without a partial rendering transparent of power mechanisms, in other words democratization, and even then rarely without an initial phase of open violence from below), to name these

* surrealism and
primitivism -
modernism &
anthropology

processes thus is evidently misleading, since they did not constitute any “revolution” in the precise sense of the word, but instead, and exclusively, a re-distribution of the symbolic hegemony, and this called for a certain uncovering of artistic processes and presupposed a phase of barbarism and iconoclasm. In the cultural domain “revolution” is a code word for “legitimate” violence against latency. It stages the break of its new, procedurally-aware operators with the holisms and geniality of bourgeois artistic situations.

*
anarchism
barbarism
iconoclasm
antropology

To illustrate the parallelism between atmospheric explanations of the climate and cultural-“revolutionary” onslaughts against the attitudes of the bourgeois art-going public, it might help to recall one of the best-known scenes from the surrealist offensive. On July 1, 1936, Salvador Dalí, who presented himself early on in his career as the self-proclaimed ambassador of the surrealist empire, was to hold a performance lecture on the occasion of the *International Surrealist Exhibition* in London’s New Burlington Galleries. During the lecture he planned to demonstrate, with references to his exhibits, the principles of his self-developed “paranoid critical method.” So that his mere appearance made it perfectly clear to his audience that he was speaking to them as a radical representative of “Elsewhere” and in the name of the “Other,” Dalí decided to deliver his address in a deep-sea diving suit; according to a July 7 report in the London daily newspaper *Star*, a car radiator was mounted above the helmet, the artist was carrying a billiard queue in his hand, and was accompanied

by two large dogs.¹ In his self-portrayal *How One Becomes Dalí*, the actionist relates a version of the incident that befell this staging.

“I had decided to make a speech at this exhibit, but from inside a deep-sea diver’s suit, to symbolize the subconscious. I was put into the outfit, even including the leaden shoes that nailed me to the spot. I had to be carried up to the stage. Then the helmet was screwed and bolted on. I started my speech behind the glass facepiece in front of a microphone which of course picked up nothing. But my facial expressions fascinated the audience. Soon they saw me open-mouthed, apoplectic, then turning blue, my eyes revulsed. No one had thought of connecting me to an air supply and I was yelling out that I was asphyxiating. The specialist who had put the suit on me was nowhere to be found. I gesticulated in such a way as to make friends understand that the situation was becoming critical. One of them grabbed a pair of scissors and tried in vain to cut a vent in the fabric, another tried to unscrew the helmet—and, when that did not work, started banging at the bolts with a hammer. My head pounded like a ringing bell and my eyes teared with pain. I was being pulled and pushed every which way. Two men were trying to force the mask off, while a third kept striking blows that knocked me out.

1. Cf. *The Unspeakable Confessions of Salvador Dalí as Told to André Parinaud*, Trans. Harold J. Salamson, New York: William Morrow and Company, 1976, p. 182.

The stage had turned into a frenzied melee from which I emerged as a disjointed puppet in my copper helmet that resounded like a gong. At this, the crowd went wild with applause before the total success of the Dalinian mimodrama which in its eyes was a representation of the conscious trying to apprehend the subconscious. I almost died of this triumph. When finally they got the helmet off I was as pale as Jesus coming out of the desert after the forty-day fast.”

The scene makes two things clear: first, that surrealism is a kind of dilettantism insofar as it uses technical objects not in the conditions specific to them but as symbolic draperies; second, that it is nevertheless part of modernity's movement of explication, insofar as it unequivocally presents itself as a procedure which opens up latency and resolves the background. One important aspect of resolving the background in the cultural field is the attempt to destroy the art-industry consensus between producers and receivers in order to free events of “showing” in their radical specificity. It explicates the absoluteness of the act of production as well as the proper value of the act of reception. Such interventions have a combat value as acts of enlightenment against provincialism and cultural narcissism. It was not for nothing that the surrealists, in the early waves of their offensive, defined the art of baffling the bourgeois as a *sui generis* form of action: on the one hand, because it helped its innovators to distinguish between the ingroup and the outgroup; and, on the other, because it permitted protests from the public to be interpreted

as a sign of success in dismantling the established system. Whoever scandalizes the bourgeois professes his progressive iconoclasm; he wields terror against symbols to explode positions of mystified latency and uses ever explicit techniques to force breakthroughs. The premise of symbolic aggression lies in the legitimate assumption that the cultural closets are overly filled with corpses and that it is high time that the latency-protected links between armament and edification be ruptured. If the early avant-garde fell into fallacy, however, this is because the bourgeoisie they set out to horrify always learned its lesson much faster than any of the aesthetic bogeymen had predicted. After only a few rounds of the match between the provokers and the provoked, it was almost inevitable that the bourgeoisie, loosened up by mass culture, would take the lead role in matters of explicating art, culture and signification through the activities of marketing, design and autohypnosis; meanwhile some artists continued on playing the public bogeymen, failing to notice that their methods were past their use-by date, while other artists negotiated a shift to neo-romanticism, renewing their pact with depth. Before long many moderns appeared to have forgotten Hegel's fundamental principle of modern philosophy, whose analogue in aesthetic production would be: that the depth of a thought can be measured only by its power of elaboration—otherwise depth is no more than an empty symbol of unresolved latency.

Dali's failed and thereby instructive performance can serve to validate these diagnoses: on the one hand, it proves

that destroying the consensus between artist and audience no longer works once the latter has understood the new rule according to which the extension of the work to the work's environment is itself to be received as a form of work. The enthusiastic applause reserved for Dalí at the New Burlington Galleries illustrated the thoroughgoing manner with which the informed public adhered to the new conventions of artistic perception. On the other, the scene showed the artist as latency breaker, he who has come to deliver a message to the prosaic people from the Empire of Otherness. Dalí's function in this game is characterized by an ambivalence that speaks volumes about his oscillation between romanticism and objectivity: on the one hand, he recommends himself as a technologist of the Other, that is inasmuch as in his undelivered speech he planned—this much is evident from its title “Authentic Paranoid Fantasies”—to demonstrate a precise method to make it possible to master access to the “unconscious.” We have here one of Dalí's paranoid-critical methods in which he stipulated formal instructions aiming at the “Conquest of the Irrational.”² Dalí professed to practice a kind of photorealism as applied to internal, irrational images: the point was to render the content of dreams and deliriums objective with the precision of an old master. Already at this time, Dalí saw his

2. Salvador Dalí, “Declaration of the Independence of the Imagination and of the Rights of Man to His Own Madness” in *La Conquête de l'Irrationnel*, 1935. Published in English in *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*, ed. Haim Finkelstein, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

work as a parallel action to the art of the so-called “discovery of the unconscious through psychoanalysis”—a scientific myth diversely adopted by the aesthetic avant-gardes of the twenties and thirties not to mention the educated public (and to which Lacan again gave a certain repute between the fifties and seventies by his reviving of surrealist forms of speech for his “return to Freud”). From this viewpoint, surrealism ranks as a manifestation of the operativist “revolution” which aimed at continually forging advancements in modernization. However, Dalí also clung to a decidedly anti-critical romantic concept of the ambassador-artist *qua* delegate of a profoundly meaningful “great beyond” who wanders among the unenlightened. But this gesture betrays Dalí as an imperious amateur, given over to the illusion of using an exacting technical device for the expression of meta-physical kitsch. Such is exemplary of the user mindset, whereby, in childlike fashion, one leaves the technical side of one’s own performance to specialists, the competence of whom one has not bothered to verify. Moreover, the fact that the scene was unrehearsed betrays the artist’s merely literary competence with technical structures.

Nevertheless, Dalí’s choice of outfit is revealing; the accident itself was prophetic—and not only with regard to the audience’s reaction, which proclaimed the new cultural habitus of applauding the not-understood. The artist’s choosing to wear a deep-sea diver suit with an artificial air supply for his performance as the “Ambassador from the depths” unerringly ties him to the unfolding of atmospherical

consciousness, which, as I have attempted to show, is central to **the self-explication of culture in the 20th century**. Although he only succeeded in a half-technical interpretation of the world and its cultural background *qua* “sea of the unconscious,” Dalí the surrealist still puts the task of navigating this space with formally developed procedures on the agenda. His performance makes obvious that conscious existence in this era must be lived as an explicit diving-into-contexts. Whoever ventures from his camp and into multi-milieu society must be sure of his “diving gear”; that is of his physical and mental immune system. The accident cannot be put down to dilettantism alone; it further exposes the systematic risks of atmospheric **explication and of the technical forcing of access to the other element**—exactly like the way in which the risk of poisoning one’s own troops in gas warfare is inseparable from military atmoterrorism. If Dalí’s account of the incident is accurate, then it would not have taken much for him to go down in modernist cultural history as a martyr of symbolic dives.

Under the circumstances, the accident proved to be a form of production, triggering in the artist the panic that had driven his work from the beginning. In the failed attempt to represent the “subconscious” as a navigable zone, the extermination anxiety that **the aesthetic explication process is supposed to master and repress itself rises to the surface**. Put in more general terms: the contraphobic experimentation of modernization can never really emancipate itself from its own background of anxiety, since the latter

could only appear were anxiety *per se* to be admitted into existence—a hypothesis which the very nature of things excludes. Modernity conceived as the explication of the background gives thereby remains trapped in a phobic circle, striving to overcome anxiety through technology, which itself generates more anxiety. Both primary and secondary anxieties provide an ever renewed impulsion for continuing the process; at every step of modernization, their urgency justifies the use of further violence to break open latency and control the background—or to use the current prescribed terminology: it demands fundamental research and permanent innovation.

Aesthetic modernity is a procedure of applying force not against people or things, but against unexplained cultural relations. It organizes waves of attacks against all-encompassing attitudes such as faith, love and moral rectitude, as well as pseudo-evident categories such as form, content, image, work and art. Its *modus operandi* is an experiment *in vivo* on the users of these concepts. As a consequence, aggressive modernism involves a thoroughgoing break with reverence for the classics, which, as it notes with extreme aversion, most often manifests a vague holism connected to a propensity to follow *totums* left in their unexplainedness and unexplicatedness. Out of its keen will to explicitness, surrealism declares war on mediocrity, detecting in it an opportune hiding place for the anti-modern inertias resistant to the operative unfolding of folded, latent givens. Because, in this war of mentalities, normality is presented as a crime, art *qua* crime-fighting

medium is able to invoke extraordinary intervention orders. Isaac Babel's declaring that: "banality is the counter-revolution," also indirectly articulates the principle of "revolution": the use of horror as violence against morality explodes aesthetic and social latency, exposing the laws whereby societies and artworks are constructed. Permanent "revolution" demands permanent horror. It presumes a society that continually proves anew to be horri-fiable and revisable. The art of the new is steeped in the thrill of the latest novelty, because it emerges by mimicking terror and in a parallelism with war—often without being able to say whether it is declaring war on the war of societies or waging a war on its own account. The artist is constantly faced with the decision of whether to advance as a saver of differences or as a warlord of innovation against the general public. Given this ambivalence in modernist aggression, the so-called postmodern is not totally wrong to define itself as the anti-explicit and anti-extremist reaction to modernity's aesthetic and analytic terrorism.

Like all terrorism, the aesthetic is reliant on an unmarked background against which artworks are articulated and which it brings onto the fore-stage to appear as a phenomenon in its own right. The prototype of this tendency of modern painting, Kasimir Malevich's *Black Square* from 1913, owes its inexhaustible interpretability to the artist's decision to evacuate the pictorial space in favor of a pure, dark plane. Its being-a-square thus becomes a figure itself of what in other pictorial situations is relegated to the background support. The scandal of the artwork consists, among other things, in

that it continues to assert itself as a painting in its own right and by no means attempts to pass off the empty canvas as a point of attraction, as might be imagined would be the case in the context of Dadaist art-ridiculing actions. The painting can be regarded as the Platonic icon of a square that, in its minimal irregularity, simultaneously pays tribute to the sensible world; however, it is also an icon of the aniconic or preiconic—of the usually invisible background of the image. The black square is as such placed against a white background which surrounds it as a quasi-frame; even this difference then comes to be virtually abolished in his *White on White* (1918). The fundamental gesture of these kinds of form-representations consists in elevating the unthematic into the thematic. What is brought into the foreground are not the multiple possible picture contents that might be placed against an always same background; instead the background as such is meticulously painted and thus turned into the explicit figure of figure-bearing. The desire for the “supremacy of pure sensation” indisputably brings with it a terror of purification. The work demands the unconditional surrender of viewer perception to its real presence.

With its anti-naturalism and anti-phenomenalism, suprematism clearly enlists in the offensive movement on the aesthetic flank of explication, but it nonetheless remains committed to the idealist assumption—meaning that the fact of making-explicit leads from a present, sensory form to a not-present, intellectual form. Insofar as it explains things by drawing upwards and simplifies empirical forms by reducing

them to pure primary forms, suprematism is therefore pegged to old European and Platonic models. On this point, surrealism proceeds in a different manner, since it is more connected to a making-explicit of material that draws downwards—but without going so far as to call itself *sous*realism. But while the surrealist movement's materialist tendency was merely a coquetry, its alliance with depth psychologies, particularly with the psychoanalytic current, discloses a trait of a specific character. The surrealist reception of Viennese psychoanalysis is one of the numerous cases illustrating that Freudianism's early success among the educated public and numerous artists was not due to its being a therapeutic method—which naturally no more than a small number of people experienced first hand—but rather to its being a strategy for reading signs and manipulating background givens, permitting those interested to make free use of it in accordance with their own needs. Is it not that we are always most fond of the psychoanalysis that we have not undergone?

Freud's approach led to the unfolding of a domain of latency of a particular type, to which the name the "unconscious" was given, a term borrowed from the idealist philosophies of Schelling, Schubert, and Carus, and from the philosophies of life of the 19th century, particularly those of Schopenhauer and Hartmann; this term defined a subjective dimension of non-unconcealment, of internal latencies and of invisible latent presuppositions linked to I-like states. After its Freudian redefinition, the concept's meaning was radically narrowed, becoming sufficiently specialized to make it useable for clinical

operationalization; no longer did it designate a reservoir of dark, integrating forces, a nature capable of healing and generating images, situated upstream of consciousness; nor did it designate an underground comprised of blindly self-affirming currents of will existing beneath the “subject”: it designated a small, inner container that becomes filled through repressions and that is placed under neurogenic pressure by the impulse of the repressed.³ The Surrealists’ enthusiasm for psychoanalysis was based on their mistaking the Freudian concept of the unconscious with that of Romantic metaphysics. It is from one such creative, false reading that we have Dalí’s 1939 “Declaration of Independence of the Imagination and of the Rights of Man to His Own Madness” in which there are statements such as this: “It is man’s right to love women with ecstatic heads of fish. It is a man’s right to decide that lukewarm telephones are disgusting, and to demand telephones that are as cold, green and aphrodisiac as the augur-troubled sleep of Spanish flies.”⁴ The surrealist reference to the right to be mad alerts people to their propensity to submit to normalizing therapies. It strives to make of ordinarily unhappy people monarchists who

3. The philosophical sources of the concept of the unconscious are presented most notably in the works of Odo Marquard, *Transzendentaler Idealismus. Romantische Naturphilosophie*, Cologne: Verlag für Philosophie, 1987, and Jean-Marie Vaysse, *L'inconscient des modernes. Essai sur l'origine métaphysique de la psychanalyse*, Paris: Gallimard, 1999.

4. Salvador Dalí, “Declaration of the Independence of the Imagination and of the Rights of Man to His Own Madness,” p. 334.

pursue their own return from rational-neurotic exile into a kingdom of the most personal madness.

If Dalí's July 1936 performance ended when his helpers enabled his return to the general atmosphere of the London gallery by tearing off his diving helmet, the right solution to this particular incident proves useless for the general situation of civilization, since the process of atmospheric **explication** bars all return to once taken-for-granted implicit conditions. By contrast to Dalí's experiment, the conditions of technical civilization no longer allow the essential to be forgotten: namely, that individuals who currently or habitually find themselves in distinctly indoor situations must be hooked up to a life-sustaining "air supply system"—unless, as discussed earlier, they were victims to a climatic *Sonderbehandlung*. The **progressive explication of the** atmosphere forces a sustained mindfulness of the air's breathability—above all, in the physical sense, and then, more and more, in the metaphoric dimensions of respiration in cultural spaces of motivation and concern. With the passing of the 20th century, the theory of homo sapiens *qua* pupils of the air ultimately also acquires pragmatic contours. We begin to understand that man is not only what he eats, but what he breathes and that in which he is immersed. Cultures are collective conditions of immersion in air and sign systems.

[With the transition from the 20th century to the 21st, the subject of the cultural sciences thus becomes: : *making the air conditions explicit*. These sciences practice pneumatology

with an empirical disposition. For the now, this program can only be carried out by reconstruction and accumulation, because the “thing itself,” the universe of influenced climata, of designed atmospheres, of modified airs and of adjusted, measured, legalized environments, has—with the very far-reaching advances in the explication of natural scientific, technical, military, legislative legal, architectonic and artistic spheres—gained an almost unbeatable head start over the attempt to formulate concepts in cultural theory. As a result, the soundest approach for cultural theory to take would seem to be, in a first phase of self-confirmation, to orient itself with respect to the most highly-developed forms of scientific atmospheric description, that is meteorology and climatology, after which it could then devote itself to exploring climatic and air phenomena that are more apposite to culture and closer to persons. \

Modern meteorology (a term derived, in the 17th century, from the Greek *metéoros*, or “high in the air”)—*qua* science of “precipitation” and other bodies that produce flashes in the sky or hover at altitude—has, through its most successfully publicized form, the so-called weather report, imposed on the populations of modern nation states and political media-communities a historically new kind of conversation, best described as a “climatological briefing.” Modern societies are “weather-chat” communities wherein an official climatological information system places in the mouths of its citizens the topics for their own reflections on the prevailing weather conditions. By means of media-assisted

communication about the weather, large modern communities, encompassing many millions of members, are turned into village-like neighborhoods of people discussing how the weather is too hot, too cold, too rainy or too dry for the season. Modern weather reporting turns national populations into the spectators of a climate theater, one which also continually urges receivers to compare their personal perception with the status report and form their own opinion about current weather events. By describing the weather as nature's performance to the community, meteorologists muster individuals into an audience of connoisseurs under a common sky; of each individual, they make a climate-critic who evaluates nature's latest performance according to his own personal tastes. In periods of poor weather, the more demanding climate critics fly in copious numbers to regions in which they can expect an acceptable performance with sufficient probability—which is why between Christmas Eve and Epiphany, Mauritius and Morocco are awash with weather dissidents from Germany and France.

So long as meteorology presents itself as a natural science and nothing else, it can pass in silence over the question of the weather's possible author. Taken as a purely natural context, climate is something that is entirely self-made, ceaselessly proceeding from one state to the next. As such, it suffices merely to describe the most important "factors" of climate in their dynamic effects on one another. These several factors—namely: the atmosphere (gaseous envelope), the hydrosphere (water world), the biosphere (plant and animal

worlds), the cryosphere (the ice region), the pedosphere (solid land)—together, under the influence of the sun's radiation, comprise extremely complex patterns of energy exchange, representable in terms that are entirely natural scientific and devoid of all reference to any intelligence that allegedly either had a prior plan or intervened subsequently.⁵ These processes are so complex that an adequate analysis of them demands a new kind of physics able to deal with their unpredictable currents and "chaotic" turbulences. Even a weather physics retrofitted with chaos theory can do without recourse to a transcendental intelligence; it needs neither deism's clockmaker nor the world weather maker of animistic provenance to interpret its data. It stands in the tradition of western rationalism, which from modern times on has exonerated every still possible God of any responsibility for weather phenomena and elevated him to supra-climatic zones. Zeus and Jupiter may well have hurled lightning bolts, the God of modern Europeans is a *deus otiosus* and *eo ipso* inactive in the climate domain. The modern weather report can therefore present itself as a discipline of regional ontology in which one speaks of causes, but not of instigators. It speaks of that which happens just by itself and according to its own conditions, of how it happens, and of that which, in the best of cases, gets "reflected" as objective quality data in a subjective medium.

5. Cf. Thomas E. Graedel and Paul J. Crutzen, *Atmosphäre im Wandel. Die empfindliche Lufthülle unseres Planeten*, Heidelberg, Berlin and Oxford: Spektrum, 1996, pp. 3–5.

Heidegger
subjectivism
AWP

Nevertheless, modern meteorology is allied to a progressive subjectivization of the weather—in many senses: for one, because it increasingly relates climatic “givens” to the opinions, calculations, and reactions of populations, in relation to whose own projects the atmospheric environment becomes less and less indifferent; second, because the objective climate, both regional and global, must increasingly be described as the result of the life-styles of modern industrial societies. Both of these aspects, which set the weather in relation to people of the modern age—*qua* clients and co-causers of the weather—are objectively interrelated. Of course, from the perspective of an older tradition, the weather report as we know it ought already to appear as a form of incitement to blasphemy, since it encourages the impudence of having an opinion about something that, according to metaphysical orthodoxy, should only ever lead to an attitude of quiet resignation. For those of the past age, the principle of the weather is like that of birth and death; it comes from God and from Him alone. In the tradition, devotion to God and devotion to the weather are analogous indicators of the effort that a wise subject undertakes to minimize his differences with respect to the true, the fundamental, and the first. However, the modern tendency to cultivate “opinions” about the climate is not just a question of the subject’s humor, a humor which deviates from a valid ontological norm and which it would be best to desist from indulging in; it reflects the fact that ever since the 18th century the polytechnically active European and European

cultures have actually become creative climate powers. Nowadays, what human beings meet in the weather are the expecorations—become atmospherically objective—of their own industrial-chemotechnical, militaristic, locomotive, and tourist activities. Thanks to their billions of micro-emissions, the sum total of these activities not only changes the atmospheric energy balance; it also affects the global atmosphere's composition and "mood." The need to have an opinion about the climate is therefore not so much a sign of the capricious anthropocentric taking over of everything that exists outside of oneself. Instead it paves the way for a fundamental change in attitude whereby human beings lose their status as would-be "lords and masters" of nature and become atmosphere designers and climate guardians—but they ought not be confused with Heidegger's guardians of Being.

The challenge that has been thrown out to modern man's climatic power of judgment, on the macro-level, is primarily the result of a phenomenon that is known in public debate as the anthropogenic greenhouse effect. This latter can be defined as the cumulative effects of climate-modifying emissions from human cultural and technical activities, such as the operation of power plants, industrial facilities, private heaters, automobiles, airplanes, and countless other types of fume discharge and exhaust into the ambient air. This secondary greenhouse effect, which has been noted in a diffuse way for barely two hundred years, and in an explicit formulation for just under three decades, is an historical fact that reflects the energy-consumption style of the

“industrial age”: it is the climatic trace of a civilizing project based on facilitated access to great quantities of fossil fuels thanks to coal mining and oil production.⁶ Access to fossil energy is the objective linchpin of frivolity; without it there would be no global consumer society, no automobile tourism, no world market for meat and fashion.⁷ In the evolving mass demand for energy-rich carbons, the Palaeozoic “subterranean forest” was drawn to the earth’s surface in solid and liquid form and converted by thermal engines.⁸ As a consequence, the combustion product that is carbon dioxide has (along with methane, carbon monoxide, fluorocarbons and various nitrogen oxides, etc.) quantitatively played the most significant role in enriching the atmosphere with second-order greenhouse factors. These gases reinforce the primary greenhouse effect in a way that will likely lead to catastrophe, but earth climate science cannot ever overly stress the importance of this effect, without which life on earth would be impossible. If the earth, as parasite of the sun, came to be the birthplace of life—it draws just under a billionth of the sun’s radiating energy—it is because water vapor and greenhouse gasses in the earth’s atmosphere hinder

6. Cf. Günter Barudis. *Tränen des Teufels. Eine Weltgeschichte des Erdöls*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001.

7. Cf. Peter Sloterdijk and Hans-Jürgen Heinrichs, *Die Sonne und der Tod. Dialogische Untersuchungen*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001, pp. 320–329.

8. Rolf Peter Sieferle, *The Subterranean Forest: Energy Systems and the Industrial Revolution*, Cambridge: White Horse Press, 2001.

the reflection of the sun's emitted short-wave energy in the form of long-wave infrared radiation, causing the earth's surface to warm to a life-compatible median temperature of plus 15° Celsius. If the warmth trap through which solar energy is held in the atmosphere were to fail, then temperatures on the earth's surface would not exceed an average of minus 18° Celsius: "Without the greenhouse effect, the earth would be a vast ice desert." Life as we know it is contingent on the fact that, thanks to its atmospheric filter, the earth's surface lives thirty-three degrees beyond its means. If people are, to quote Herder once again, pupils of the air, then the clouds are their tutors. Life is a side effect of having been climatically spoiled. The signature of the fossil energy age is shown in the fact that the spoiled jeopardize their spoiledness by running the risk of anthropogenic overheating (or, according to other mathematical projections, of an intermediary ice age).¹⁰

Long before the macroclimatological understanding of these consequences took on a scientific shape and attracted public notice, modern cultural participants drew on their powers of climate judgment for more regional and smaller-scale phenomena—climate control in houses and apartments,

9. Sylvie Joussaume, *Klima. Gestern, heute, morgen*, Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer, 1996, p. 62.

10. The technical and mental preconditions of the transition into a post-fossil fuels civilization are discussed in Carl Amery and Hermann Scheer, *Klimawechsel. Von der fossilen zur solaren Kultur*, Munich: Kunstman, 2001.

which man-made hearths first transformed into convivial islands of warmth; the chilling effect of the cellar, allowing food and beverages to be cooled; the miasmatic air quality in public spaces near cemeteries, slaughtering yards and cloacas;¹¹ the precarious atmospheric conditions of numerous workplaces such as weaving mills, mines and quarries where organic and mineral dust led to serious lung disease. From these sources of various kinds of perceptible, microclimatic air alterations, we moved—from the 18th and 20th centuries—to the very same design-precipitated “discovery of the obvious” by which people, in **the age of explication**, were motivated—a second time round—to take hold of what lay at hand. These were the fields in which the concrete atmo-technologies were developed, and without which modern forms of existence in urban or rural contexts would be unimaginable: the heating and ventilation systems in private homes and large-scale architectures; the artificial adjustment of temperature and humidity in living spaces and storage spaces; the installing of refrigerators in apartments and the construction of fixed or mobile cooling rooms for storing and transporting foodstuffs; policies of air hygiene in workplace environments in factories, mines and office buildings¹²; and, finally, the aroma-technical

11. Cf. The Excursus on “Merdrokratie” in Peter Sloterdijk *Sphären II, Globen*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999, pp. 340–354.

12. Cf. Erich Heck, *Indoor Quality am Arbeitsplatz. “Sick Building Syndrome” and “Building Related Illness.” Ein deutsch-amerikanischer Rechtsvergleich*, Baden-Baden: Low & Vorderwulbecke, 1994.

modification of the atmospheres whereby the transition to active air-design was accomplished.

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.” Since there is always something in the air, advances in atmosphere **explication** throw up the idea that, by way of precaution, we might put something in it ourselves.

The technological path diverges at this point from that of the phenomenologists, who, with their descriptive means, have long sought to explicate human dwelling in its global atmospheric conditions. Along these lines, Luce Irigaray has even suggested that Heidegger’s concept of *Lichtung* be bracketed and replaced by a meditation on air—the “airing” instead of the “clearing.” As she puts it: “It is not light that creates the clearing, but light comes about only in virtue of the transparent levity of air. Light presupposes air.”¹³

Nevertheless, air constitutes an implicit condition of existence, which, as Irigaray never tires of underlining, lies latent in the unthought and the unperceived—but she does not ever meditate on the fact that the newer aero-technical practice of this supposedly unthought-of factor has long been used as a field of application for highly explicit procedures. It is plain to see: at the edge of the phenomenal world, any thinking that stays phenomenological for too long turns into

13. Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, trans. Mary Beth Mader, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1999, p. 166.

an internal water-color, which in the best of cases fades into non-technical contemplation.

Air design, on the contrary, also “encounters” the air from a position of practical force. It replaces a hygienically-motivated defensive attitude, i.e. the concern to keep the air clean, and enlists the thus thematized air in a positive program—which is in some sense the continuation of the private use of perfume with other means. Air design aims at directly modifying the mood of airspace users—it serves the indirectly manifest purpose of enticing a space’s passers-by with pleasant, smell-induced impressions of a situation, contributing to heightened product acceptance and willingness to buy.¹⁴ The atmosphere at the point-of-sale comes to have a central place as a “discrete marketing instrument.” This active Indoor-Air-Quality-Policy enables commerce to launch into the “shopping-experience” sector, by which it hopes to bind customers affectively to both the salesroom and the selection. The legality of such subliminally invasive methods for inducing a “psychological obligation to buy” is controversial. If customers interpret this “coercive fragrancing” as a manipulative attempt, then the patent and attested reactions are aversive ones—in other cases, however, the carefully-chosen olfactory tingeing of the shopping environment is seen as a welcome part of a well-designed customer service. Through the design of breathing environments with

14. Cf. Anja Shöhr, *Air-Design als Erfolgsfaktor im Handel. Modellgestützte Erfolgsbeurteilung und strategische Empfehlung*, Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitäts-Verlag, 1998.

psychoactive designer air—most notably in shopping malls, but also in clinics, trade fairs, conference centers, hotels, “experience” worlds, health and wellness areas, passenger cabins and the like—the principle of interior architecture is extended to an otherwise imperceptible milieu of everyday life: that of a breather’s gaseous and aromatic environment. The reference values for such interventions have been derived from empirical observations of airspace users’ “olfactory comfort,” the conclusions of which indicate that complex “olfactory offers” are preferable to “mono-fragrances.” The first tenet of the newly-emerging odor ethics holds that no essences may be used to mask negative smells and contaminants in a given space. The underlying subtrend toward an “odor-hedonistic society”¹⁵ joins up at this point with the primary consumer society trend that consists in developing “experience markets” and “scenes” in which atmospheres are dispensed as part of the general situation of attractions, signs, and contact opportunities.¹⁶

Let us not forget that today’s so-called consumer society was invented in a greenhouse—in the very same glass-canopied, nineteenth-century arcades in which the first generation of “experience customers” learned to breathe the intoxicating scent of an enclosed, interior-world full of

Benjamin

15. Cf. Diotima von Kempfski, *Raumluft-Essenzen-Zugabe. Ein kleiner Leitfaden über Grundlagen und Anwendungsmöglichkeiten*, Karlsruhe, 1999.

16. Cf. Gerhard Schulze, *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft. Kultursociologie der Gegenwart*, Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 1993, 10th Chapter “Theorie der Szene,” p. 459ff.

commodities. These arcades represented an early level of urban atmosphere explication—an objective invagination of the “dwelling-addicted” disposition which, to Walter Benjamin’s mind, captured the 19th century. Dwelling addiction, says Benjamin, is the irresistible drive to shape and re-shape a casing for ourselves.¹⁷ In Benjamin’s doctrine of the interior, the eternal need for uterus-simulation is explicitly conceived in conjunction with a concrete historical situation’s symbolic forms. But what the large buildings of the 20th century also proved is just how far the construction of “casings” would be taken beyond the search for a liveable interior.

In the chronicle of aesthetic and cultural-theoretical atmosphere **explication**, the year 1936 not only goes down as the year of Salvador Dalí’s diver-suit accident in London; in Vienna on November 1st of the same year, the then 31-year-old writer Elias Canetti gave a speech on the occasion of Hermann Broch’s 50th birthday, unusual both in tone and content, in which he not only drew an in-depth portrait of an author, but also founded a new genre of laudatory speech. The originality of Canetti’s speech lay in his unprecedented way of questioning the correlation between an author and his time. Canetti defined an artist’s dwelling in his period as a breathing-relation—

17. Cf. Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk, Gesammelte Schriften V I*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989, p. 292. Published in English as *The Arcades Project*, Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999, p. 220.

as a particular mode of immersion in the tangible atmospheric conditions of the age. He saw in Broch the first great master of a “poetry of the atmospheric as a static thing”¹⁸—meaning an art that would be capable of bringing the “static breathing-space” into view, or in our terms: the climate design of people and of groups in their typical spaces.

“...for he is always concentrated on the wholeness of the space he finds himself in, on a kind of atmospheric unity.”¹⁹

Canetti praises Broch’s ability to grasp each human being he presents in a quasi-ecological way: in each person, he recognizes a singular existence breathing his own air, surrounded in a distinctive climate envelope, and integrated into a personal “breathing economy.” He likens the poet to a curious bird who has the freedom to slip into any cage, taking “air samples” with him as he leaves. Endowed with a “respiratory” and enigmatically keen air-memory, the poet is one who is able to feel how it is to be at home in such-and-such an atmospheric habitat. Because Broch approaches his figures more as a poet than a philosopher, he does not describe them as abstract I-points in a general ether; he portrays them as embodied *gestalts*, each of which lives in his own specific atmosphere

18. Elias Canetti, “Hermann Broch: Speech for His Fiftieth Birthday,” in: *The Conscience of Words. Essays*. Trans. Joachim Neugroschel, New York: Seabury Press 1979, p.11. Translation modified.

19. *Ibid.*, p.8.

and moves between a variety of atmospheric constellations. It is only in view of these multiplicities that the question as to the possibilities of a poetry “which takes its form from respiratory experience” comes to fruitful disclosure:

“We would have to reply, above all, that the multiplicity in our world consists to a large extent in the multiplicity of our breathing-spaces. The room you are sitting in here, in a very definite arrangement, almost totally cut off from the world around us, the way each person’s breath mixes into an air common to all of you ...all those things, from the breather’s standpoint, are a totally unique... situation. But then, go a few steps further and you will find a completely different situation of another breathing space...The big city is as full of such breathing-spaces as of individual people. Now none of these people is like the next, each is a kind of cul-de-sac; and just as their splintering makes up the chief attraction and chief distress of life, so too one could also lament the splintering of the atmosphere.”²⁰

In this characterization, Broch’s narrative art is held to rest upon the discovery of atmospheric multiplicities, through which the modern novel was able to go beyond mere representations of individual destinies. Its subject is no longer individuals in their entangled actions and experiences, but rather the extended entity of individual *and* breathing space.

20. *The Conscience of Words. Essays*, p.10.

Its plots no longer take place between people, but between respiratory economies and their respective residents. This ecological vision permits us to place modernity's critical motif, that of alienation, on different foundations: it is the atmospheric separateness between people that assures their embedding in "economies" specific to each of them; the unavailability of some persons to differently-attuned, differently-enveloped, and differently-air conditioned others is indeed more and more evident. The breaking up of the social world into spaces of moral independence inaccessible to one another is analogous to the micro-climatic "fragmenting of the atmosphere" (which in turn is correlative to the fragmentation of the "world of values"). After his advances in the areas of the individual climate and personal ecology, Broch came systematically to apprehend the modern individual's depth of isolation; as such, the question of the conditions for unification within a shared ether beyond atmospheric fragmentation could not but force itself upon him with clarity and urgency; there is nothing equalling his questioning either in his own time or in later sociological investigations into the element of social cohesion—that is with the possible exception of the similar approach pursued by Canetti in *Crowds and Power*. In his 1936 speech, Canetti recognizes in Hermann Broch the prophet who has alerted us to an as-yet unprecedented threat to humanity—a danger emerging from the atmosphere, both literally and metaphorically:

“However, the greatest of all dangers ever to emerge in the history of mankind has chosen our generation as a victim.

It is the defenselessness of breathing, which I would like to talk about in conclusion. One can hardly form too great a notion of it. To nothing is a man so open as to air. He moves in it as Adam did in Paradise... Air is the last common property. It belongs to all people collectively. It is not doled out in advance, even the poorest may partake of it... And this last thing, which has belonged to all of us collectively, shall poison all of us collectively... Hermann Broch's work stands between war and war, gas war and gas war. It could be that he still somewhere feels the poisonous particles of the last war... What is certain, however, is that he, who knows how to breathe better than we do, is already choking on the gas that shall claim our breath."²¹

Canetti's solemn observation shows how the givens of the 1915–18 gas war were translated in conceptual terms by the most acute observer of the 1930s: Broch understood that after the intentional perturbations of the atmosphere in chemical warfare, the social synthesis itself in many ways takes on the character of a gas war, as if atmoterrorism had been turned inward. The "total war," which pronounces itself in old particles and new indices, would then inevitably take on the traits of an environmental war. In this war, the atmosphere itself becomes the war theater. More: the air becomes a weapon and a battlefield of a peculiar kind. And further still: through the commonly breathed air, through the ether of the

21. *The Conscience of Words. Essays*, p. 13.

collective, the community that succumbs to madness will henceforth wage toxic war on itself. Exactly how this can occur Broch was to explain by a theory of “states of somnolence” (*Dämmerzustände*), which is without a doubt the most original, albeit most fragmented, part of his hypotheses about mass psychology.

States of somnolence are states in which people move as mere trend followers under the trance of the normal. Because the forthcoming “total war” will in principle be battled by atomterrorist and ecological means (and therefore in the medium of total mass communication), it aims to strike at troops’ “morale,” troops who are increasingly seldom distinguished from the general population. Both combatants and non-combatants—the synchronously gassed and the simultaneously provoked—become bound together in a state of collective somnolence through toxic communions. The modern masses then see themselves integrated into an emergency-communist unity which bestows upon them an acute feeling of identity born of *the* common threat. What then proves particularly dangerous are the climatic toxins emitted from people themselves, since, desperately agitated, they stand sealed together under a communication bell jar: in the pathogenic air conditions of agitated and subjugated publics, inhabitants are constantly re-inhaling their own exhalate. Whatever hangs in the air here has been put in it by totalitarian forms of circular communication: the air is filled with these hurt masses’ dreams of victory, with their ecstatic and empirically cut-off acts of self-aggrandizement, these masses

who are followed like a shadow by their desire to humiliate others. Life in the media state resembles a stay in a gas palace of high-spirited adventures.

Broch's post-1936 visions were not based only on the imminent expectation of another world war, which the author presumed would largely be conducted in the form of a universal and mutual "gassing"²²; more, they were based on his socio-theoretical diagnosis according to which large modern societies, integrated from the mass media viewpoint, have entered a phase in which their day-to-day existence has, from the atmospheric viewpoint, come under the domination of mass-psychological mechanisms. Thereafter, a *theory of mass insanity* necessarily came to take a central place in his diagnosis of the present; it is this theory which, starting in 1939, Broch would work on for an entire decade.

22. Cf. Paul Michael Lützel, *Hermann Broch. Eine Biographie*, Frankfurt am Main, 1985, p. 209. The word "Vergasung" appears in a letter to Ernst Schönwiese on October 3rd, 1936. I do not know if Broch was aware that the highly poisonous warfare gases tabun (1934) and sarin (1938) were being developed in an I.G. Farben research laboratory. Memories of the gas war also induced many other authors to draw a bleak prognosis of the future. One such author was Erich Kästner in the "The Last Chapter," a poem included in the 1930 volume *Ein Mann gibt Auskunft* (A Man Is Giving Information): "One day in the year 2003 a thousand airplanes fly from Boston loaded with gas and bacteria to kill all of humanity, because this is humanity's only way of achieving its goal of world peace." It is curious that he dates his satire on the death-drive "July 13," the eve of the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille. See, Erich Kästner, *Kästner für Erwachsene, Ausgewählte Schriften, Band 1*, Zurich, 1983, pp. 219–220.

In this theory, permanent communication by means of daily newspapers and radio become the vectors and agents of hallucinatory structures. It posits that daily newspapers and radio function, for the most part, as a media of disinhibition whereby statements end up coming true—this phenomenon was one whose rise and deployment Broch's older colleague, Karl Kraus, observed and struggled a lifetime against (only in February of 1936, in the last issue of *Die Fackel*, published four months before his death, did Kraus finally give up his fight against the "air of Sodom");²³ we should note that already in 1908 he produced a tableau depicting atmospheric hazes of the worst sort to evoke pre-war tension in Europe: "Fumes from the sewage of the world brain pervade everywhere, not a breath of air is left for culture."²⁴ To characterize the effects of such media using the once missionary and now secular term "propaganda" would be saying too little. These effects serve to immerse entire national populations in strategically generated trend climates, and thus constitute the informational analogue to chemical warfare. From a distance, what Broch's theoretical intuition grasps is the parallelism between gas warfare—as the attempt to surround the enemy in a poison cloud thick enough to annihilate him physically—and the production of mass insanity—as an attempt to envelop one's own population in a sufficiently self-destructive,

23. Karl Kraus, *Briefe an Sidonie Nadherny von Borutin 1913–1936*, Volume I, Munich, 1974, p. 167.

24. Karl Kraus, *Die Fackel*, reprint, Frankfurt am Main. 1977, issue 261–2, 1908, p. 1.

ecstatic atmosphere, glutted with cravings for “super satisfactions.” In both cases, totalizing envelopes are created that capture their victims or residents in total relationship with no way out: the nationalized atmosphere itself acts as a “closed system”; airspace hangs about its residents and creates a zone of prescribed possession. Beneath the totalitarian semiotic sphere, human beings are constantly re-inhaling their own lies-cum-public-opinion and freely chosen absence of freedom, moving around in an opportunistic trance. We see even more clearly in what individuals consist when they are in such toxic atmospheres than when they are in freer conditions; they are “sleepwalkers” in a “social daydream,”²⁵ moving about in their set-ups as if by remote control. They gather under flags and slogans as if they were co-owners of castles in the air. “Flags are wind made visible. They are like bits cut from clouds... Nations use them to mark the air above them as their own, as though the wind could be partitioned.”²⁶

On the basis of similar intuitions, Broch developed the first approach to a new type of atmosphere ethics. This ethics deals, in its “hygienic” section, with the prophylaxis of collective fitfulness, and, in its “therapeutic” part, with the bringing back of those who have been captured and intoxicated into

25. Hermann Broch, *Massenwahntheorie. Beiträge zu einer Psychologie der Politik*, Frankfurt 1979, p. 454.

26. Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, Trans. Carol Stewart, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1962, p. 86.

the liveable rationality of an “open system”—*alias* democracy or the division of panics and hysterias.²⁷ Measured against the duties and responsibilities of such an ethic of the atmospheric, not only did the democracies of 1939 live in a “world of yesterday”²⁸; today they are again so blind to their acute penchant for forming closed atmospheres and for according excessive importance to the hallucinatory systems built by victors, that it is as if the political-psychological and moral lessons of the 20th century were given to empty classrooms.²⁹

Marcel Duchamp spent the Christmas of 1919 with his family in Rouen. On the evening of December 27, shortly before he was about to board the *SS Touraine* in Le Havre to go to New York, he sought out a pharmacy in *rue Blomet*, where he convinced the pharmacist to pull a mid-sized vial from his shelf, open the seal, empty its liquid contents and re-seal the bell-shaped container. Duchamp took the empty ampoule with him in his luggage and presented it to his hosts in New York, the collector couple Walter and Louise Arensberg, as a

27. *Ibid.* p. 306f. In *Sphären III, Schäume*, I use Brochs' suggestive remarks to develop an explicit “atmosphere-ethics.”

28. *Ibid.*, p. 334.

29. Broch phrased the lesson as follows: “The struggle is for... the victory obsession as such, and when it is brought successfully to this end, this ‘triumph over victory’ is no longer victory in the traditional sense... one would almost like to say that, from this time on, the typical (and thus exceedingly human) victory yell would have to be replaced by a victory mourn...” l.c. p. 344.

gift, explaining that because the wealthy couple already had everything, he wanted to bring them 50 cubic centimeters of *Air de Paris*. And thus it happened that a volume of French air made it onto the list of the first readymades. It apparently didn't concern Duchamp in the least that his readymade air-object was a counterfeit from the beginning, since it was not filled with Parisian air, but with that of a pharmacy in Le Havre. The naming act was of greater import than the real origin. Nevertheless, the "original" did still matter to him; when in 1949 a boy accidentally shattered the vial of "Parisian air" in Arensberg's collection, Duchamp had an obliging friend in Le Havre procure the same vial from the same pharmacy.³⁰ Ten years later in a New York hotel lounge, Duchamp said to an interviewer: "Art was a dream that became unnecessary... I spend my time very easily, but I wouldn't know how to tell you what I do... I'm a *respirateur*—a breather."³¹

30. Cf. Calvin Tomkins, *Marcel Duchamp: A Biography*, New York 1996, p. 223, 374 and 208

31. *Ibid.* p. 408. The conversation partner is Calvin Tomkins himself.

Outlook

In modernity's campaign against the self-evident not only air and the atmosphere, but also culture, art and life have come under an explicative pressure that has radically altered the mode of being specific to these "givens." **What was once background and saturated latency has with the energy of thematization been moved over to the side of the represented, the objective, the elaborated, and the producible.** With the three forms of terror, of iconoclasm and of science, three latency-breaking forces took up position; their effects have brought about the ruining of the givens and interpretations pertaining to old lifeworlds. Terror explicates the environment from the aspect of its vulnerability; iconoclasm explicates culture from the experience of its parodiability; **science explicates first nature from the perspective of its substitutability via prosthetic devices and its ability to be integrated into technical procedures.** All-encompassing situations that hitherto could be experienced in the mode of dedication, participation, and agenda-free communion have, through **explication**, been translated into a quasi-objective

atmo-, theorema-, video terror

thetic character, founded on feasibility and technical realization, without people's being able, for this same reason, to cease living in these "circumstances" or "media." Distrust may grow: we remain immanent to that which is suspect. We are condemned to being-in, even if the containers and atmospheres in which we are forced to surround ourselves can no longer be taken for granted as being good in nature.

These circumstantial totalities that we cannot abandon, but that neither can we unquestionably trust, have, since the beginning of the 20th century, been termed "Umwelt"—a term introduced in 1909 by Jakob von Uexküll into the language of theoretical biology, which ever since has had the confusing career that sometimes befalls terms that have the appearance of self-evidence.¹ The observation that life is always life-in-an-environment—and hence also against other environments—triggers a perpetual crisis of holism: humanity's old-fashioned propensity to submit to local totalities as if to benevolent local gods is divested of all orientational value, since the surroundings have themselves become constructs, or are recognized as such. So, in the age of atmospheric toxins, strategies, and hidden agendas all such quasi-religious consenting to place one's trust in one's primary surroundings—be it nature, the cosmos, creation, homeland, situation, etc.—takes on the guise of an invitation to self-harm. Advancing **explication** not only forces a semantic change in the meaning of naivety, it means that it becomes

1. Jakob von Uexküll, *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere*, Berlin, 1909; 2nd Edition, 1921.

increasingly in-your-face, and even objectionable; the naïve, nowadays, is that which encourages sleepwalking in the midst of present danger. Having become aware of the primary and secondary greenhouse effects, living and breathing under open skies can no longer hold the same meaning as before. From the open-air homeland that mortals have had since time eternity, something uncanny, uninhabitable, unbreathable was withdrawn. Ever since Pasteur and Koch discovered the existence of microbes and had it established in scientific publications, human existence has had to be prepared to take explicit measures for symbiosis with the invisible—and all the more so to prevent and defend itself against microbiotic competitors that have now been identified with precision. As of the 1915 German gas attacks and their allied retaliations, the air totally lost its innocence; as of 1919, portions of it could be gifted as “ready-mades”; and as of 1924 it could be used as a means of executing delinquents. With the press’ *Gleichschaltung* during the World War, civilian communication was attacked from the ground up: signs themselves became sullied and compromised by their involvement in warmongering deliria and psycho-semantic arms races; the critiques of religion, of ideology and of language have declared vast parts of our semantic environments to be intellectually unbreathable zones—from thereon in, the only responsible thing to do seems to be to dwell in places that analysis has evacuated, re-constructed and re-approved for habitation. Even the Mona Lisa smiled differently after Duchamp planted the beard on her.

Under these conditions, immune systems become a subject for debate. When everything is latently able to be contaminated and poisoned, when everything is potentially deceptive and suspect, neither totality nor the possibility of being a Whole can any longer be inferred from external circumstances. No longer can integrity be thought of as something that is obtained through devotion to the benevolent surroundings, but instead only as the individual effort of an organism's concern with demarcating itself out from its environment. This paves the way for a new motif of thought without which the modern economy of ideas would be inchoate: namely, the idea according to which life insists less in its being-there, by its participation in the whole, but instead by its stabilization through self-closure and the selective refusal of participation. To describe this as the fundamental thought for a post-metaphysical or differently-metaphysical civilization is not saying too little. Its psychosocial trace manifests itself in the shock of naturalism, a shock whereby the culture that sheds biological light on itself learns to pass from a fantasmatic ethics of universal, peaceful coexistence to an ethics of the antagonistic protection of the interests of finite unities—a learning process in which the political system has had a manifest lead ever since Machiavelli. Such an ethics can only be consolidated through a fundamental mediation on the sources of immunity.

Intellectual enlightenment of the 20th century has been determined by the twilight of immunity. An apprenticeship

in mistrust unparalleled in the history of ideas has tainted the sense of all that had hitherto been known as rationality. For the intelligentsia moving at the front of this development, the years of non-devotion begin.

as a domain of latency

systems theory }
systems thinking } Luhmann

42 machine-enslavement - lethal
loop of air

48 locality - Umwelt - Verknüpfung
- invitation to self harm

48-49 Herder - anthropology - climate -

50 airquake - cf. w/ "The Luftkoker"

54-56 jubombing of Dresden - Geopolitical
machine - Thermoterrain - Manato-
politics

58 attacks on the enemy's lifeworld

60-62 Herdigger - Heimatlosigkeit - Ge-Stell -
"urban habitation machine" - Beyond -
dwelling

69-70 advance & effect of explication - dwelling in
latency - two sleepers implicit/explicit -

71. surrealism - modernity's movement of explication

79 aesthetic modernity - tradition

88-89 multipotentiality - subjectivization