This PDF includes a chapter from the following book:

Borders as Infrastructure
The Technopolitics of Border Control

© 2021 Massachusetts Institute of Technology

License Terms:

OA Funding Provided By:

The title-level DOI for this work is:

doi:10.7551/mitpress/11926.001.0001

3   The Shape of Technopolitics

The Morphology of Borders

Europe's policies concerning international migration are an expression of the fraught struggle over sovereignty, jurisdiction, and mobility, revealing both state power and impotence. As constructions, borders materialize compromises between conflicting ideas and interests. Borders shape networks of circulation, instituting both crude and refined selection mechanisms to sort people. But alongside the deployment of barbed wire, ID systems, databases, and patrol boats, borders are bringing something else into motion: the machinery of governing, decision-making, risk assessment, and coordination. To study the variegated nature of borders and their entanglement with technology and politics, chapter 2 introduced the notion of "border infrastructure," which holds that borders are structures or networks concerned with the movement of migrants and travelers, as well as tools, instruments, information, experts, and knowledge that enable borders to classify and select people in order to manage human circulation. But borders and the technologies that comprise them are no mere instruments of political decision-making; they contain within themselves implicit or explicit political goals, generate unforeseen consequences, and encourage political intervention. Borders thus function as vehicles for politics. Studying their shape reveals the *morphology of politics*, as the materiality and spatiality of borders shape the technopolitics of movement.[1]

This chapter turns to the philosophies of Bruno Latour and Peter Sloterdijk, whose works point the way to a morphological notion of technopolitics, with which it becomes possible to navigate the materiality and movability of borders and border politics. The previous chapter described several

characteristics of Europe's borders-as-infrastructures and introduced the notions of infrastructural imagination, competition, and compromise. But what kind of technopolitics do these characteristics give rise to? As I argued in chapter 1, there are many available options between technology as an instrument and technology as a way to view the world. Both Latour and Sloterdijk try to seize the *tertium datur*, the project of bringing the excluded third back in (namely the networks that connect objects and instruments to worldviews).[2] By reading Sloterdijk's theory of spheres through Latour's notion of actors and networks, I aim to develop an account of morphology and mediation that allows us to follow the movements between instruments, networks, and worldviews. As such, it deepens the concept of border infrastructures and relates it to the philosophy of technology and science and technology studies.[3]

Both Latour and Sloterdijk focus on the materiality and spatiality of the sociotechnical configurations in which technopolitics takes place. Their philosophies create awareness of the specific meanings of technopolitics and the various ways in which humans, institutions, and technologies are connected and confront each other. The aim of this chapter is to develop a morphological understanding of border infrastructures. This means transcending the boundary between politics and technology—and between ideas and things—by exploring how political ideas travel via things and technologies, as well as how devices, databases, and instruments are containers of political ideas and vehicles for political action. Based on the ontology, spherology, and political theology of Latour and Sloterdijk, the discussion here develops the concept of *peramorphic politics*—a morphological technopolitical account of how borders and politics give and receive shape.

My examination of Sloterdijk focuses on his *Spheres* trilogy, where discussion of artifacts, from buildings to ships and from the history of air conditioning to the use of poison gas in warfare, reveals an often-inspiring endeavor to conceptualize technology. Sloterdijk's conception of politics emphasizes the architectural spaces and places where politics is born. With its hyperbolic power, his work often kicks the spatial thinking of politics into overdrive by arguing that being itself is nothing other than extensiveness. But despite such metaphorical flourishes, I show in this chapter that Sloterdijk's repertoire is well suited for understanding how borders function as the vehicles of politics.

Latour's work is driven by an interest in mediation—in how humans, technologies, and nature intermingle and develop societies from the inside out. His work is concerned with the relationship between hybridization and solidification and how humans, ideas, and materialities group together to form social, technological, and political bodies through processes of association and translation and then disintegrate, redistribute, and reconnect. The following sections will show that a mediated account of movement, materiality, and space can contribute greatly to our understanding of the emergence of border infrastructures and the technopolitics that that entails.

Sloterdijk's Spheres: Bubbles, Globes, and Foams

Concepts of "technology" and "politics" are rampant throughout the literature on borders, explicitly and implicitly, but research into how technology and politics form, reform, and transform each other leaves much to be discovered. Precisely because a "border," both as a concept and as an entity, is mobile and to some degree indefinite, it offers a range of morphological modalities of technology and politics. The work of Peter Sloterdijk lends itself to explore these modalities well because he can be considered as a "morphological thinker" par excellence.[4] The space that we have as humans, and our possibilities for shaping our lives, create a common thread that runs through his work. The *enfant terrible* pursuing members of the Frankfurt School and their descendants investigates the position of the subject in an era when philosophical considerations have been overpowered by liberalism, economics, technology, and pragmatic thinking. This began with Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1988; originally 1983) and reached its controversial zenith with *Rules for the Human Zoo*: *A Response to the Letter on Humanism* (2009; originally 1999), in which he considered the biotechnological possibilities for managing the human "zoo" both now and in the future. The *Spheres* trilogy (Sloterdijk 2011, 2014, 2016; originally 1998, 1999, 2004) addresses the spaciousness of *being*—thinking, living, but above all building and housing—with the work of Heidegger frequently playing the role of whipping boy. According to Sloterdijk, being should not be thought of in relation to time, as Heidegger did in *Being and Time* (1927), but rather in relation to space. As chapter 1 explained, Heidegger (1977) argued that technology is usually defined in either an instrumental or an anthropological

way. While the former places technology in a means-ends relationship, the latter regards it as the result of human activities. According to Heidegger, the essence of technology is not technological itself. Instead, technology contains a certain mode or attitude toward reality that unveils something about the relationship between humans and technologies, and ultimately about our being.

Sloterdijk takes a different tack. He situates being within the architecture of existence. According to him, being should not eclipse "becoming" and "moving," or how humans always create relationships with their surroundings.[5] Sloterdijk is interested in the locations of being, as well as in the spatial circumstances in which it comes into existence. It is, as he puts it, "a theory of humans as beings living in homes, and a theory of agglomeration of those beings in their diverse forms of living and gathering together."[6] According to Latour, Sloterdijk asks an architectural question, "one that is just as material as the geologists with their inquisitive hammer: where do you reside when you say that you have a 'global view' of the universe? How are you protected from annihilation? What do you see? Which air do you breathe? How are you warmed, clothed and fed? And if you can't fulfill those basic requirements of life, how is it that you still claim to talk about anything that is true and beautiful or that you occupy some higher moral ground?"[7] Meanwhile, these architectural and material issues are embedded in a theory of movement, as Sloterdijk explains in *Infinite Mobilization* (2020, originally 1989), in which he redefines modernization as a kinetic process.

Sloterdijk calls the architectures that result out of these movements spheres—environments of thinking and living that form climate zones within which the temperature can be regulated. These spheres not only are located in the subject's consciousness, but also are expressed in the buildings, the infrastructure, the means of transport, the media, and other technologies that we construct. Anyone who wants to understand being not only has to investigate the thinking "I," consciousness, or *Dasein*, but must also make the link to the cosmopolitan architecture of the spectacle-fixated consumer society within which it is shaped. For Sloterdijk, "Dasein is design."[8]

Sloterdijk's *Spheres* trilogy is very relevant to the discussion of border infrastructures. He reinterprets borders as creating immune systems. They separate the outer from the inner and, as with air conditioning in a car, create an agreeable climate as we race down the highway. This hyperbolic

metaphor brings Sloterdijk to his understanding of politics: a formalized struggle for the redistribution of opportunities for comfort and psychological and physical well-being. It is a battle for access to the most favorable immune technology. From questions about the equitable distribution of goods, we move on to questions about the distribution of risks and opportunities for comfort and life chances.

Sloterdijk's conceptual repertoire, as developed in the *Spheres* trilogy, is underutilized in the analysis of borders. However, caution is required. A critical reading of the *Spheres* trilogy is needed to prevent an overly simple identification of spheres and immune systems with nations and national identities as "bodies," "organisms," or "homes." The notion of "immune systems" is telling in the context of migration politics and seems applicable beyond the comparison with walled states. The externalization of the border control policies of the European Union (EU) toward third countries, as described in the previous chapter, can be read as an attempt to regain sovereignty over the control of international mobility by introducing highly technological partnerships that displace the control of Europe's borders south of the Mediterranean, and increasingly south of the Sahara as well. According to Sloterdijk, this spatial expansion culminates in the process of globalization. To this end, in the first two parts of the trilogy, Sloterdijk examines the entire inner and outer space of Western cultural history. He does this in a literally breathtaking way, rewriting history as a climatological war—a struggle for the fresh air that is necessary to supply the spirit and the body with oxygen. The link that connects the inner and outer worlds of Western thought is represented in the first part of the trilogy, *Bubbles*, by the metaphor of the globe. Since the time of the Greek philosophers, the globe has stood for both the totality of beings and all that is good. The globe symbolizes the safe inner space (the womb, the home, the town), out of which thought emerged, as well as the wild outer space (the globe of the Earth), over which Western thought has spread, spiritually and materially.

Based on this metaphor of the globe, Sloterdijk examines the process of globalization in the second part of his trilogy (appropriately named *Globes*). Western intellectual history is reflected not only in material and spatial projects such as architecture and spatial planning, but also in conquests, crusades, discoveries, colonialism, exploitation, and globalization. In particular, *Globes* is concerned with borders, boundaries, and walls. The cities

and walls in ancient Mesopotamia, Babylon, and China contained religious, military, and psychopolitical aspects. Some aspects of these ancient city walls still seem to apply to the present. Walls, according to Sloterdijk, cannot be fully grasped by their military pretensions, or by their claim to protect against enemies or outside forces. Walls also constitute a community or bring about a certain truth claim by establishing an unmistakable and self-explanatory entity. In that sense, walls are the material expression of the sovereignty of a group of people, a political unity—a sphere. "Spheropoiesis" is the notion that Sloterdijk uses to refer to this building of walls and creation of spheres. Spheres, however, are neither the direct translation of a state nor the will of the people into a bordered community. Sloterdijk is too much a media philosopher to rely on such an unmediated model.

Instead, spheres can be typified in the terms that Latour introduced. Spheres emerge via processes of *mediation* and *translation*: they arise in medias res. According to Sloterdijk, instead of being the expression of unified cities and communities or singular nation states, spheres are the product of co-isolation. Co-isolation should be understood not only in terms of the coupling of separated entities, but also as a prelude to the emergence of spheres. The process of bordering is not unlike how processes of coproduction are described in science and technology studies—namely, as the simultaneous development of political and technological. Co-isolation contains a moment of co-construction. Instead of regarding a border as a line dividing two existing entities, whether they are states, territories, or populations, the moment of creating a border can also be conceived as a foundational moment—or more precise, to use the term that was applied previously, a "mediating moment"—for the coming into being of co-isolated spheres.

From the outset, Sloterdijk claims, globalization has been driven by the pursuit of climate control, which is parasitic by nature. A climate has to nourish itself; it has to breathe and remain pure. Globes separate the outer from the inner and, like air conditioning in a car, create an agreeable climate while we race along the motorway guzzling fuel. The Western globe—the dominant one—is swallowing up the world. The "inner space of capitalism," as Sloterdijk calls it, is working overtime. Bringing in fresh air by turning up the air conditioning in our own economy inevitably leads to overexploitation elsewhere. The worldwide greenhouse effect, food and energy shortages, and the bursting of the soap bubble of financial capitalism (all of which are also due to rising temperatures) are the virtually inevitable results of this process. The huge flows

of money, goods, information, and people have caused the Earth to overheat. The permanently high voltage of the continuously expanding Western comfort zone has made the indoor universe more pleasant but has left the outdoor space like a battlefield. The immune system is close to collapse.

In *Foams*, the final part of the trilogy, Sloterdijk examines more closely how these catastrophes are connected. He combines, somewhat dialectically, the microspherology of *Bubbles* with the macrospherology of *Globes*. It would be going too far to say that he is looking for a possible solution to the world's crises. But without saying it in so many words, he poses the question of whether and how the global spheres can still be collectively managed. *Foams*, according to Sloterdijk, offers "a theory of the present age from the perspective that 'life' unfolds multifocally, multiperspectivally, and heterarchically." It "can no longer be considered using the tools of ontological simplification."[9] To construct such a theory, Sloterdijk seeks to follow Latour's imperative to replace sociology with a theory of networks. Foam is the perfect metaphor for these networks, as:

> the lively thought-image of foam serves to recover the premetaphysical pluralism of world-inventions postmetaphysically. It helps us to enter the element of a manifold thought undeterred by the nihilistic pathos that involuntarily accompanied a reflection disappointed by monological metaphysics during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It explains once again what this liveliness is about: the statement "God is dead" is affirmed as the good news of the present day. One could reformulate it thus: "So the One Orb has imploded—now the foams are alive."[10]

The beginning of *Foams* is far from optimistic. Sloterdijk sets the tone by dating the beginning of the twentieth century in 1915, with the first gas attack by German troops in World War I. Where foam represents the fragile connection between isolated bubbles, the gas is the destroyer of this connection. The immune system is not only about to collapse due to overheating; it is also threatened by myriad new enemies.

The distinction between enemies of our own creation, such as the atomic bomb, and natural enemies such as viruses are not of great importance for understanding these immune disorders. Relentless developments in science and technology in particular are constantly improving our ability to identify and understand the threats to our biotope, and they teach us that the enemy is legion and cares little about our distinction between the natural and the social—witness the umpteenth announcement of a pandemic. The cell wall of the immune system is showing cracks; the inner and outer worlds are

leaking into each other. Heidegger's homely dwelling, in which humans could unlock their true being, has become a playground for designers, engineers, lawyers, and politicians.

Sloterdijk's wordplay is often poetic and metaphorical. Sometimes this strengthens the expressiveness of his work; but at other moments, his hyperboles stand in the way of precision.[11] Nonetheless, we can find in Sloterdijk a philosophical vocabulary that offers important ideas for conceptualizing the workings of borders, the emergence of border infrastructures, and the nature of technopolitics. The biological and organic metaphors ("cells," "immune systems," etc.) are less important to me than his description of the coming into being and extension of architectures of thought, action, and movement. By constantly emphasizing the housing of ideas, Sloterdijk presses the history of European thought in a material-philosophical mold—a morphological reconstruction of the movement of ideas. Meanwhile, he describes how these thought-vehicles group together, organize movement, create tensions, culminate in wars, and allow the coupling and uncoupling of concepts. As such, Sloterdijk's spherology underlines two notions: (1) the morphology of technopolitics and the intimate relationship between thought and action, and (2) the movability of politics and technologies.

An example that is illustrative of the morphology of technopolitics and the movability of politics and technologies is the history of barbed wire. Barbed wire and the ideas behind it exemplify a particular aspect of modernity, one that connects violence, colonization, warfare, globalization, and—we might add—migration. Barbed wire was used to demarcate land ownership in the colonization of the American West and to prevent the enemy from crossing the lines in the battlefields of World War I. It shares a cruel history with the transportation, deportation, and encampment of people, as the concentration camps and the trains to Auschwitz testify.[12]

Barbed wire, razor wire, and concertina wire give the barriers, fences, and walls around the world a familiar look. The US-Mexico border, the Israeli West Bank barrier, the fence between Turkey and Syria, and the immigration detention centers in Australia and Libya are covered with their sharp edges and points, revealing the ambivalent relationship between borders and mobility. Concertina wire is a type of barbed or razor wire that comes in single, double, or crossed spiral coils. It can quickly be expanded like a concertina, an aerophone musical instrument similar to an accordion. Its

applications include enhancing fences and walls and securing borders and military bases. According to Hebei Wanxiang Concertina Wire Company, a manufacturer based in China, concertina wire will "frighten or hurt" anyone who wishes to get through. As a mobile security barrier, it "is designed for rapid deployment" in "police and other special operations . . . in security and rescue or riot control." As a fence, it is a "very powerful device" to stop the "unwanted entry of enemies or animals." Its "sharp blades and spiral structure can trap anyone who intends to go through or over the concertina wire."[13]

Concertina wire can be found all over the globe. For many migrants, it is their encounter with the materiality of borders.[14] In 2005, thousands of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa were hurt by the sharp wires when they collectively tried to overcome the border fences of the Spanish enclaves Ceuta and Melilla on African territory. Concertina wire is also one of the main components of the border fence erected by Hungary on its borders with Serbia and Croatia in 2015 during the "migrant crisis" that was described in the previous chapter. The current fence will be equipped with other technologies, including devices capable of delivering electric shocks to unwanted migrants, heat sensors, cameras, and loudspeakers to blare messages in multiple languages. But concertina wire itself continues to be the defining feature of the border fence.[15] It has such symbolic significance that the German firm Mutanox refused to sell it to Hungary to be used for this purpose.[16]

Facts, Foams, and the Fabrication of Worlds

Two aspects of Sloterdijk's spherology that have been identified here (namely, the morphology of technopolitics and the intimate relationship between thought and action, as well as the movability of politics and technologies) clearly echo the voice of Latour. Not without reason, in *Foams*, Sloterdijk declares his indebtedness to his French colleague.[17] Suspicious of procedural forms of democratic politics and of human, all too human political constellations, Latour advances notions such as a thing being a gathering to underline the ontological entanglement of humans and nonhumans.[18] What does this say about different forms of politics? In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour (1993) explains that technologies in general and

entities on the threshold of science and society, or nature and culture in particular, call for a special kind of political attention.

These questions evade the usual distinction between social and scientific problems that has maintained the division of labor between political representatives and scientific experts. Latour advances a precise definition of modernity, which he sees as a purification process. With his idea of a parliament of things, Latour suggests that the emancipation process that has brought modern democracy to humanity should now apply to objects as well.[19] In a way, such a parliament of the hybrid order had been installed several years earlier. Rather than the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, it is the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) installed in 1988 that typifies the rise of hybrids breaking the walls of modernist dichotomy. The modern era is made up of epistemological and ontological divisions where issues are taken apart and polarized, resulting in science versus politics, nature versus culture, subject versus object, and people versus things. But an ethnographic view of the history of modernity and its present-day manifestations (cities, infrastructure, laboratories, technoscience, and so on) enables Latour to argue that numerous interconnections have always formed a bridge between us and the environment, of which social and political groups have always been aware. The question is how these hybrids can be articulated in opposition to modernity's dichotomous ways of thinking.

Latour gradually abandoned his notion of a parliament. Indeed, the dissemination of issues and audiences and the distribution of power among public and private bodies indicate that the political is omnipresent, and not only in democratic institutions. Nor is the political only linked to representation and deliberation, the traditional forms of democratic expression. At the exhibition *Making Things Public* which Latour mounted with Peter Weibel in the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie in Karlsruhe in 2005, the visual played a central role. All these installations (it would be going too far to speak of "works of art") were examples of making visible the external effects of technology, which creates new audiences that become visible in public parliaments—meeting places outside the formal democratic order. Such parliaments, Latour argues, are urgently needed to give all hybrids that make up the technological globe a presence and place.[20]

In a contribution to the catalog for Latour and Weibel's exhibition, Sloterdijk endorses the view that a democratic system stands or falls on

the possibility of catching political objects and making them public. For this reason, Sloterdijk in Foams talks of the need for "making the immune systems explicit."[21] Whereas Latour is concerned with a process of articulation, Sloterdijk talks of explication: the world is "explained" more or less as the IPCC has documented attacks on the Earth's biosphere—the same IPCC that Latour once classified as a parliament of the hybrid order that unites science and politics in a new way and gives a voice to both social and natural reality. These explication forms also apply to border infrastructures; as Sloterdijk says: "One of the hallmarks of progressive explication is that it expands the security arrangements of existence—from the antibody and dietary level to the welfare state and military apparatus—into formally secure institutions and disciplines."[22]

Like Latour, Sloterdijk sees little point in any strict demarcation between a registry of things and a registry of persons. In the twentieth century, it was science above all that supplied modernity. Science has transformed the modern world into a virtually uncontrolled, open-air experiment with the introduction of an unknown number of new entities, ranging from the double helix of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) to genetically modified organisms and nanoparticles. Even mathematicians share the blame for this, as evidenced by the invention of the notorious collateralized debt obligations (CDOs), the innovative banking products that were partly responsible for the financial crisis of 2007. Sloterdijk notes that Latour is a radical-democratic scientific optimist whose research is a joyful philosophy of a world populated with the products of explication. For Sloterdijk, Latour's contributions contain "the stimulus for an epistemological civil rights movement—with the aim of integrating the technical objects and animal symbionts into an expanded constitutional space, thus creating an integral republic that finally recognizes not only human agents, but also artifacts and creatures as ontologically fellow citizens."[23]

Affectionately, Sloterdijk calls his French colleague *Der Mann, der die Wissenschaften liebt* (The Man who Loves Science). Words of praise indeed, but reading between the lines, one cannot avoid the impression that he considers Latour to be a touch naive. What they have in common is their view of modernization as a kind of air freshener that tries to keep out the hybrids. Sloterdijk talks about the effects of the air freshener in terms of "immunization," while Latour talks of "purification." But whereas Latour is fascinated

by all new entities that can find themselves a place in a shared socionatural order, Sloterdijk sees mainly hazards and enemies. Globalization creates one air bubble after another, from the Internet bubble and the millennium bug to filter bubbles on Facebook, Google, and Twitter and plunges us under a thick layer of foam. It leads to a worldwide bubble bath in which we are in danger of drowning.

The image of globalization as a worldwide bubble bath symbolizes modern pluralism. To Sloterdijk's great dissatisfaction, twentieth-century philosophy was able to think of pluralism only in terms of individualism. This began with Gottfried Leibniz's monadology, as how can there be a connection among atoms, cells, and people—in short, among all the individual "globes" in the cosmos—if these are all sealed off, windowless, and separate? Latour's solution lies in an extremely democratic ontology. As no other has done before or since, he has made an art of debunking all distinctions that are speculative rather than concrete in nature.

That relationship is not as distant as it seems. What Latour himself made clear early in *Irreductions*, part two of *The Pasteurization of France*, is that his research on science and technology is based on a specific theory of relations and objects. Latour's philosophy is deeply rooted in post-Kantian thought and debates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries about the nature of reality and how it relates to our cognitive abilities. His philosophy bears unmistakable traces of William James (1842–1910), and especially Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947). To Latour, this leads to a typical combination of realism and relationism. From this position, he arrives at a specific theory regarding what he calls "translations"—the way in which actors make connections between things that exist in reality, thereby changing and enlarging the world. This creates the networks that make up our world: irreducibly real and material structures that bring order to the world.

Of crucial importance when building these networks is the figure of actor as mediator. Anyone who wishes to give a political dimension to the role of the scientist will quickly recognize a Machiavellian aspect to this process. This is the case, except that this Machiavelli of Latour's is no Machiavellian. Latour reads *Il Principe* (The Prince) as a discourse on how institutions and relations are created if a new entity emerges and a protagonist appears on the stage to fill the vacuum. The researchers whom Latour studied, such as the chemist and biologist Louis Pasteur (1822–1895) and the physicist

and chemist (and later Nobel laureate in chemistry) Frédéric Joliot-Curie (1900–1958), succeeded in doing medical or atomic research and adding new objects (molecules and microbes for Pasteur, atoms and neutrons for Joliot) to the world's ontology. But they were also able to relate the existence of microorganisms and microparticles to political and social issues like public health programs and military-strategic nuclear politics. This makes the actors, objects, and networks successful.

Like Latour, Sloterdijk falls back on relational ontology to escape the tragedy of the lonely particles. Sloterdijk's spheres theory is based on monadology, the theory of windowless particles by Leibniz. The notion of monadology is derived from the Greek word *monas*, meaning "unit." In Sloterdijk's case, monadology concerns a theory about how units such as nation-states unite and divide, how their borders travel to connect and disconnect, and how the units shape specific movable infrastructures. Like Latour, he makes the leap from the micro to the macro, the particular to the universal, the individual to the group. Sloterdijk's solution to the singularity that threatens to consign objects to isolation—thereby making politics, and certainly democracy, impossible—is to achieve a plural spherology. The problem of pluralism is redefined as a question of co-isolation. Sloterdijk's bubbles have small peepholes. In the digital era, these peepholes consist not only of intercom systems by the door, but the telephone, radio, television, and the Internet. Although it is true that each person exists in the bubble of their own living environment, these bubbles now all come together in a worldwide Twitter system. But how can one get from there to a political system?

Sloterdijk and Latour see politics as being closely related to the sociotechnical ordering of the world. Both embrace the idea that a political theory first needs a theory of society, but reject the idea that there is such a thing as society. Sloterdijk and Latour see the social as something fluid, a plasma, of which social institutions and social facts are the briefly coagulated results. Latour is not interested in *matters of fact* but in *matters of concern*: things that are in motion and create new links among people, technology, and the living environment. He calls the results of this process collectives or associations—temporary clusters of social and technical relationships that do not form a whole but are related to one another as networks. Facts, in this view, are temporary points of solidification that function as black boxes that contain all the information of their past and coming into being. This history of the

coming into being of a fact is safely sealed and stored, and it starts circulating again only when a fact is disputed and reenters a controversy. The contestation of a fact, therefore, has much in common with opening a black box: all kinds of unexpected surprises that helped to keep the fact together but were safely forgotten to give the fact its face may show up again.

Latour underpins this view empirically with the results of his research. Conceptually, he plays an even bigger trump card: the fact that the social is fluid is nothing less than the reason for the existence of the political. If such a thing as a stable and well-defined society were to exist, which was knowable and representable, the political would represent nothing other than the status quo—and would thus abolish itself. Instead, Latour seeks a form of politics that can reflect that which can change: both the social and the political are looking for a form.

These concepts show similarities with what Sloterdijk calls "foam"—the lumpy collection of air bubbles of individual living environments that fill space but are empty inside. With his theory of foam, Sloterdijk wants to arrive at a new explication of social relationships. His example for the collective is neither the *Gemeinschaft* nor the *Gesellschaft*—neither the organic relationships of community nor the functional connections of society; he finds in political theory as little satisfaction in the communitarian society as in the liberal contract.

In their search for alternatives, Sloterdijk and Latour both look to the work of the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde (1843–1904). While Tarde's work has long been overshadowed by Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, Tarde has enjoyed a renaissance since 2000, not least due to the efforts of Latour himself, who is directly or indirectly responsible for a number of articles and books about him, as well as reissues and translations of his works.[24] Crucial for both Sloterdijk and Latour is Tarde's view that not only is a society made up of cells, but cells, molecules, and atoms (or any other smallest unit that one chooses) have a certain degree of organization and are small "societies." *Toute chose est une société* (Everything is a society). Instead of reductionism, Tarde already subscribed to relationism combined with realism. This radical relationism enables Sloterdijk to further elaborate his notion of co-isolation. It leads him to a theory of associations, in common with Latour as of late, with the proviso that for Sloterdijk, these associations do not so much create hybridity as spatiality. From the sociological definition, he arrives at a political definition.

In his search for a political alternative, Sloterdijk reviews three symbolic associations. The first is the national assembly, which he finds unsuitable for creating social synthesis.[25] The scale and complexity of the world's problems prevent such a localized model from being effective. He then turns to the stadium, which fits the image of a society focused on entertainment and mass spectacle. But the rhetoric of winners and losers that accompanies competitive sports impedes social integration. The image that appeals to him is the conference, where people sharing an interest gather in the short term, without forming a strict social community.[26] Conference-goers travel the world, temporarily connecting the worlds in which they live and think to create global associations. This idea of the conference resembles Latour's parliament of things, except that Sloterdijk's notion stresses even more strongly that formation, not representation, is what is at stake. Unlike a parliament, a conference is not a reflection of society, but forms it by bringing together the *res* and the *publica*.

The evaluation of national assemblies, stadiums, and conferences speaks to our concerns in this book, as Sloterdijk shifts our attention from how authority is justified in these gatherings to how they manage to combine various entities to emerge as unified beings, if only temporarily. Manifesting authority and expressing sovereignty are exactly what border infrastructures aim to do by bringing together all kinds of instruments, agencies, and information. Far from singular entities that speak univocally to travelers and migrants, border infrastructures are always in the process of creating their authority. Sloterdijk emphasizes that the "foam metaphor draws attention to the fact that there are no isolating means which are completely private property—one always shares at least one partition with an adjacent world-cell."[27] His three ideal types to represent and organize multiplicity also suggest a common concern with travel. To express authority, border infrastructures must travel, requiring all kinds of connections and collections. The movable politics of border infrastructures is grounded in the transportability of its composing elements.

Politics According to Sloterdijk and Latour

At this point, the question "What exactly is the nature of politics in a technological society?" can be asked again. The *Spheres* trilogy provides a provisional, and not entirely satisfactory answer. According to Sloterdijk, politics

consists of the formalized struggle for the redistribution of opportunities for comfort and psychological and physical well-being. It is a battle for access to the most favorable immune technology. From questions about the equitable distribution of goods, we must move on to questions about the distribution of risk and opportunity for comfort.

At first glance, Sloterdijk's view on politics is an equally magical and meta-phorical rephrase of what politics is about on the battlefields of the scorched earth where states aim to regain control over international migration. Still, something is strange about this definition. At its core, it is a formula in the style of Carl von Clausewitz: "War is the continuation of politics by other means." But if we take thinking from the inside out seriously and replace questions concerning our existence with questions concerning our extensive-ness, does this not lead to the opposite conclusion? [28] Instead of claiming that the struggle for space, comfort, immunity, resources, and technology is a politics that continues by other means, it would be more consistent to say that politics is the continuation of spatial and material conflict.

This reading has consequences for how we conceptualize the politics of technology. Rather than seeing democratic politics as the forum of legiti-mate and collectively binding decision-making about the outside world, representation, deliberation, and legislation become the continuation of technologies by other means. In this sense, human democracy can be said to be contaminated by the ontology of technopolitics.

At times, Sloterdijk's rich use of metaphors and his unbreakable irony make it hard to distinguish playful provocation from rigorous philosophical analysis. Nonetheless, his reformulation of politics fits well in the aforemen-tioned analyses of the material, nonhuman, and even posthuman condi-tions under which politics takes place, as well as of the hybrid gatherings where politics occurs. For his part, Latour falls short of a satisfactory answer to the question of how a democratic assembly or conference could be orga-nized in which hybrids are represented, but strategic action is neutralized. It is odd that an author known for introducing Machiavellianism into the world of science and technology—"science is politics by other means," he once wrote—views politics in a way that has so little to do with power. Sci-ence, according to Latour, "does not reduce to power" but offers "other means."[29] While Latour describes the decisive role of actors in forging soft and hard networks and the stability and instability of institutions, he rarely

considers inequalities of power as a problem. Whenever he appeals for more openness, less exclusivity, and political visibility for a greater range of problems, it seems to emanate from an idea of stakeholder democracy. While Latour describes this playfully as *Realpolitik* (because he is realistic about objects), his outlook has little regard for the power-conscious subtleties of political practices.

Latour's lack of attention to power and violence is exemplified in his description of a journey by the French marine officer and explorer Jean-Francois de La Pérouse (1741–1788).[30] La Pérouse was commissioned by Louis XVI to chart the Pacific Ocean. When he met Chinese people on what he called "Sakhalin," they entered into a discussion on whether Sakhalin was an island or a peninsula. To La Pérouse's surprise, writes Latour (1990) in "Drawing Things Together," the Chinese were not ignorant of cartography and drew the area on the map themselves. La Pérouse's task betrays clear colonial intentions and violence. His entire expedition disappeared under mysterious circumstances in 1788, while the guillotine would end the life of his client, Louis XVI, in 1793. None of this is to be found in Latour's writing.[31]

It is striking that Latour describes the relationship between La Pérouse and the Chinese population as "natural." In his usual ontological-technical way, Latour describes the events in terms of "inscriptions" and "calculation centers." Whether intentionally or not, Latour aligns himself with the neutral, technical tone of the French expedition. However, this description fails to recognize the history that enabled calculation centers to draw things together, or the power and violence that were often necessary for representations to circulate. Raw power has no place in Latour's descriptions. He thus remains close—too close—to the self-presentation of many scientific and technological projects (i.e., that of civilized and civilizing undertakings by gentlemen).[32]

How can we characterize Latour's and Sloterdijk's political philosophies? Rather than using a slogan such as "object-oriented politics," it is worthwhile to emphasize two characteristics: their focus on the material and nonhuman and their anti-individualism. Latour and Sloterdijk clearly do not adhere to the model of institutionalized liberal procedural democracy. Latour expands his program to show that politics, democracy, and the relationships that they manage must be accountable for the fact that we are part of a collective and hybrid problems are inescapable. In doing

so, he broadens the sphere and scope of politics without indicating what other form of democratic politics would actually work. Likewise, it would be an understatement to say that Sloterdijk pays little attention to real, existing politics. His focus is on the material shape of ideas and ideologies and the ways in which they are made to travel, thereby underscoring that the content and form of politics cannot be separated. A further similarity between Sloterdijk and Latour is that both refrain from assuming a critical perspective on technology itself. Whereas Sloterdijk considers the heirs of the Frankfurt School as being too close to a humanism that does not grant objects and technologies the ontological and political status they deserve, Latour questions critical theory for too-often abiding by a naive realism, in which matters of fact are regarded as the ground of reality and the observer has a privileged position. This perspective overlooks the processual nature of reality and how humans and things may or may not end up in associations.[33]

Technopolitics breaks with the normative distinction between humans and nonhumans, as well as with the idea that technologies can be designed and regulated according to political will. Technopolitics tends toward a post-humanist view that acknowledges the deep entanglement between the agentic capacities of humans and nonhumans.[34] Building on these views, the study of states, borders, and infrastructures starts in the middle of things without having a view from above. But the mastery of technopolitics in the analyses of Latour and Sloterdijk does not mean that other forms of politics have ceased to exist. In addition to setting its own conditions for the form and shape of politics, the morphologization of technopolitics allows various forms of politics to enter onto the stage. The emphasis on ontological politics does not mean that the instrumental uses of apparatuses or the design of border environments according to political will has disappeared. Instead, the intimate entanglements among humans, institutions, and technologies that make up border infrastructures provoke all sorts of technopolitics to come into being.

Technopolitics as Peramorphic Politics

The remaining question is how Latour's and Sloterdijk's notions of politics can be understood in relation to border infrastructures. This final section develops the notion of "peramorphic politics" as a technopolitical, morphological

account of borders. Rather than following Sloterdijk's organicist line of thinking and his emphasis on immune systems, my focus on the shape of technopolitics privileges the intimate entanglements that make up border infrastructures. This approach does not restrict itself to the study of the external characteristics of technopolitics (i.e., its material or technical extensiveness). It should be read as encouragement to consistently think inside out and outside in—an approach where technology is a vehicle for political thought and politics is a material endeavor.

For the purposes of this book, the important similarity between Latour's and Sloterdijk's views on politics is their focus on materiality, technology, space, and extensiveness. Both thinkers invite attention to the *morphology of technopolitics*. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour (1993) proposes a parliament of things, a house that unites the chambers of nature and culture and gives space to the hybrids that shape the world. While this spatial and material orientation recedes in *Politics of Nature*: *How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (2004), it returns with a vengeance in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (2005), a catalogue he co-edited with Peter Weibel. The interconnectedness of humans and nonhumans, technology and nature, and science and politics reaches its zenith in Latour's Gifford Lectures in 2013 and his subsequent book *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climate Regime* (2017). Building on the political theology of Carl Schmitt and Eric Voegelin, and engaging with anthropogenic climate change, Latour brings the concept of "globalization" back down to Earth. Again, he agrees with Sloterdijk, who (in Latour's words) maintains that "the complete oddity of Western philosophy, science, theology and politics is to have invested all its virtues in the figure of a Globe—with a capital G—without paying the slightest attention to how it could be built, sustained, maintained and inhabited."[35]

Thinking "globally" assumes a transcendental cosmology that allows a view from above—a God's-eye view from which all elements are related. In contrast, an Earthly perspective starts in medias res and acknowledges that there is neither a final cosmic order nor a final destination. This does not mean we are on our own, though. Latour argues, again following Sloterdijk, that the "globe is not what the world is made of, but a Platonic obsession transported into Christian theology and then loaded into political epistemology to provide a figure—but an impossible one—for the dream of total and complete knowledge."[36] Latour replaces the figure of the all-encompassing

Globe with one of the Earth. We Earthlings are earthbound—"'bound' as if bound by a spell, as well as 'bound' in the sense of heading somewhere, thereby designating the joint attempt to reach the Earth while being unable to escape from it."[37] This relationship with the Earth is not another blood and soil interpretation of Carl Schmitt's work, but a plea to pay attention to the composite human/nonhuman constellations of which we are a part and the impossibility of escaping from these entanglements via transcendental political theory. The same holds true for Latour's 2018 book on politics in the new climate regime, tellingly entitled *Down to Earth*.

Another contribution of Sloterdijk's trilogy is its consistent reading of institutions in material terms. The *Spheres* trilogy ends by mentioning the "city of foam"—a reference to the New Babylon of artist Constant (Nieuwenhuys) (1920–2005). For Sloterdijk, this project represents the capsular ontology of the lonely particles that connect and disconnect, the basic materials for building cities and forming conglomerations. Rather than considering parliaments as mere houses for political debate, his philosophy allows understanding political institutions and instruments as vehicles for thought that travel and expand through material expression and extension. A morphological account of technopolitics requires thinking from the inside out and replacing questions concerning our existence with questions concerning our extensiveness. Rather than framing the struggle for space, comfort, immunity, resources, and technology as politics by other means, it is more consistent to say that politics is the continuation of spatial and material conflict. Border infrastructures can be said to cast political ideas just as sculptures are cast from pouring wax into a mold.

Although neither Sloterdijk nor Latour advance what is commonly understood as political theory, their works provide building blocks to support the thesis that states are *laboratories of movement*. The "laboratory" here not only refers to the construction of large-scale infrastructures to gather information, compare situations, and control heterogeneous configurations; it also denotes the shifting in and out that is required to organize expeditions to *terrae incognitae*, as well as the circulation of flows that travel through it. The spatial and material notion of politics as developed in the works of Latour and Sloterdijk, I argue, is a valuable contribution to our understanding of the technopolitics of border infrastructures. The immanent perspective within this account of technopolitics allows studying the emergence of

border infrastructures from the inside out. Rather than relying on a transcendental point of view from which border infrastructures can be normatively evaluated, it encourages us to study their inner mechanics.

To pursue such an investigation, I return to a concept introduced in chapter 1, but which can now be given more technopolitical shape: peramorphic politics. The account of technopolitics that Latour and Sloterdijk embrace is underpinned by the idea of immanence. The main characteristic of immanence that they elaborate is extensiveness—the multiplication of technopolitics via material means—which I argue is a fruitful way to understand borders. Borders mold politics and political entities in particular ways; the relationship between border control technologies and political thought and action points to the importance of forms and shapes. As I explained in chapter 1, border politics tends to be peramorphic, while the politics of mobility tends to be a kind of peramorphic politics, as the border is ubiquitous in the political thought on migration, mobility, and security.

One way to engage with Latour and Sloterdijk is to read their works as treatises on global governance, the emergence of networks of humans and technologies, and the ontological politics of mobility and security. The discussion of Sloterdijk's *Spheres* showed engagement with multiple spheres: biospheres, atmospheres, mental spheres, and public spheres. Sloterdijk's trilogy thus admits to multiple interpretations, of which I privilege two. The first holds that *Spheres* can be understood as an eco-organicist eschatology concerned with the final events in the history of the world and the destiny of humanity. This interpretation is particularly based on Sloterdijk's treatment of immune systems, climates, and comfort zones. A second reading is that *Spheres* is a morphological genealogy of globalization. By constantly emphasizing the housing of ideas, Sloterdijk presses the history of European thought in a material-philosophical mold, a morphological reconstruction of the movement of ideas. Throughout the trilogy, he describes how these thought-vehicles group together, organize movement, create tensions, culminate in wars, and allow the coupling and decoupling of concepts. Not without reason, the notion of "birth" plays a central role in Sloterdijk's oeuvre.

Seen through Latour's interpretation of the *eschaton* in his discussion of Gaia and climate change, the eschatological and generative readings of Sloterdijk's spherology appear to have much in common. The concept of peramorphology benefits from Latour's interpretation of Voegelin's work.[38]

Latour argues against catastrophic, apocalyptic, and eschatological views of climate change and for the continuation of time *after* the end of time. This argument can also be applied to border infrastructures. Rather than seeing borders as an *eschaton* in the sense of an end, a final act, they can also be seen as mechanisms, as entities that organize circulation and continue the process of movement *after* the act of bordering. The rejection of the eschaton as the final event also implicates the continuation of the border *after* the border. A peramorphic view seeks to elide final events by following Voegelin's imperative not to render the *eschaton* immanent (i.e., to not bring an order to its end, but to follow its continuation).

Reading Sloterdijk's spherology through Latour's actor-network theory brings out the mediating moments within the material movements that connect and disconnect actors, institutions, and technologies. Latour's notion of "black-boxing" holds that facts are temporary—provisional clots of knowledge, experiments, technology, and power that can always be opened and change within future network circulations. Actors, institutions, and technologies see all kinds of exchanges, delegations, and transformations that configure their mutual components and develop novel constellations. This relationship between fluidity and solidification, between continuation and mediation, is also reflected in the temporal and spatial modality of actors, institutions, and technologies. Rather than heralding the end of times, the notion of the *eschaton* can be seen as a mediating moment at which another transformation takes place. Analogously, this view can be applied to borders and bordering. As infrastructures that make selections and organize circulation, borders continue to mediate through the reproduction, transformation, and multiplication of the processes of selection and circulation.

This chapter worked with a morphological reading of technopolitics—one that focuses on the composition and extensiveness of border infrastructures. A morphological view of border infrastructures emphasizes two aspects in particular: their materiality and movability. Note that neither Latour nor Sloterdijk developed a detailed political theory; their contributions take the shape of a possible cosmopolitics (Latour) or spherology (Sloterdijk) with political implications. Their accounts make politics both more and less ubiquitous: less, because institutional forms of politics such as parliamentary debates, governmental decision-making, and international agreements are considered but one form of ordering the world; and more, because a greater number of practices, situations, and relations have the potential to become

political within the technopolitics of border infrastructures. But arguably more important than politics becoming more or less omnipresent is its change in form. While political authority and jurisdiction may or may not shape the world, they are likely to operate in the mold of instrumental, material, architectural, and infrastructural configurations. The following chapters will unpack this idea by visiting border infrastructures in Europe, starting with an iconic hub of spheres and networks: the airport.

Fence, Ventimiglia, December 2016.
Source: Henk Wildschut.