

Becoming Weather

Weather, Embodiment and Affect

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Chapter 5

Contours D: Weathering the body

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5 Contours D

Weathering the body

Introduction

*Sitting in the sun with the goats, the dog, we relish its warmth
Whales are migrating, travelling north up the coast*

[Late May, late Autumn]

I don't know how or why, but one day I began receiving alerts in my e-mail from a Science Digest summarising research from the field of genetic studies. I went to delete it, wondering how my e-mail was phished to the mailing list when my attention was caught by one of its featured articles. The piece looked to seasonality in disease expression associated with multiple sclerosis (MS). According to a systematic review of literature by Nabizadeh et al (2022), people living with MS are more likely to suffer relapses in early spring, less likely in fall and summer. I was arrested by this, in part because my bestest oldest friend lives with this disease and, of course, I was drawn by its weathery content. I was moved by a sense of worlds coming together, by the ways that a body's co-becomings with weather can be experienced so deeply, so fundamentally.

Human bodies and our physiologies are diversely and deeply seasonal. In addition to multiple sclerosis relapses, there are also seasonal variations in our arterial blood pressure (Brennan et al 1982), nutrient intake (de Castro 1991), in the experience of rheumatoid arthritis (Iikuni et al 2007), diabetes (Moltchanova et al 2009), in human immunity (Dopico et al 2015) and so much more. The very composition of human blood, human tissue, human brains and the human genome change with the seasons. An article in *Nature Communication*, found, for example, that nearly a quarter of human genes are expressed significantly differently through the seasons (Dopico et al 2015). Here, the genome along with the cellular composition of blood and the functioning of bodily tissue vary by seasons in different ways in different places, depending on just how the seasons work in different parts of the world.

We absolutely *are* seasons ourselves, our very bodies. In the case of MS, the specific bodily mechanisms associated with seasonality are contested. Theories advanced to explain seasonality include the idea that fluctuating levels of vitamin D and melatonin create different effects, that infections rise and fall with temperature and airflow, that it is a result of changing sodium consumption and/or shifts in air

pollution throughout the year (Nabizadeh et al 2022). This is clearly a hybrid list, the contours of which can be traced through widely different scales. I am thinking, for example, of the political economy of pollution and pollution exposure, of the earth moving around the sun in space on its tilted axis, of the changing behaviours of what we might do, where and how we dwell and what we eat in the cold weather; so multiscalar are the ways weather and its complex physical-social-cultural interactions with bodies pull and shape and shift. Different contours of more-than-human experience come together in and as a human body, shaping who we are, what we do, how we are in the world including, for many, including those with multiple sclerosis, different levels of pain, mobility and cognitive fatigue.

This is our bodies-as-weather, our lives-as-weather, as time and as place. And so, in this chapter, I will linger upon a different contour of weather, one that might often be overlooked through a tendency to look for weather outwards, outside and up in the air. I will look to the ways weather is of and as our bodies, bringing the scale inward to the detailed ways that weather is experienced and made through materials, bodily responses and rhythms. Zooming into these bodily and embodied topologies, my aim is to focus on the whole worlds that exist in, on and as our more-than-human bodies.

There are so many fascinating and shifting bodily contours of weather, some of which I will pick up and follow in this chapter. These contours themselves differ in scale by significant orders of magnitude. The scales of the body are hugely diverse: from the body itself and how it moves through the world as weather shapes and guides human activities; to the sensory experiences of weather that inform our capacities to act, feel and process the world in visceral ways; to biochemical bodily processes; to the seasonality of genetic expression; to the ways bodies themselves are the “countryside” for bacteria, insects and others; and, to the weather of the body itself, the body as “weather system” with its temperatures and pressures not clearly separable from a strictly bounded outside. As such, in attending to this contour, I hope to soften the edges of the inside and outside of our bodies, lingering on the intimate particularities of our co-constitution with and as Country, as place, as weather.

I will begin by discussing some embodied experiences of weather, of senses and emotions, and the ways weather guides many human practices. I will then zoom in further, tracing micro-contours down to the mechanisms of blood and cell and immune system, and to genes, to the most microscales of our bodies. I will then turn to some of the intimate politics of weathering, for even as I talk science and body and practice, there are important politics of body and weather that have enabled racist and colonising weathery realities as well as resistances to them. My aim is to linger on the intimate bodily co-becomings of weather that make human and more-than-human bodies in and as place and time.

Milpirri isn't always outside.

Weather as a verb

*Clouds rise from a mountain stream in the morning
The valley is shrouded in a gentle white glow*
[Early June, first week of Winter]

It is raining this morning so it's warmer than it has been. It feels colder, though, the humidity easing the exchange of heat from my body to the air. We've had weeks of crisp autumnal weather, blue skies, light frost and changing leaves. As we have moved into June, it is officially winter, and this rain has arrived.

Our little family spent yesterday afternoon inside with the fire on. It felt good to be inside. In the colder months, it is often a lot warmer outside our house than in it. That pulls you outside, to do some work around the farm, to sit and read on the deck, to pull a chair or a mat onto the grass and work there bent over a laptop, to sit with the goats and the dog in a sunny spot, absorbing the gentle warmth of the sun basking in a sleepy shared contentment and more-than-human companionship. The rain shifts this of course. The goats hate it and there is no relaxing with them on the grass when it is wet. They are in their stable peering out plaintively. For me, the world looks and feels different. It's misty, so you can't see far, and there is a sense of gentle mystery. On the other side of the river, opposite the house, where the land slopes up to the escarpment, wispy clouds rise from the stream we call Cloud-maker. The delicate white puffs linger low over the trees. Inside, the fire gives an orange glow to the house so it feels warmer and snuggler. The soundscape is different too. Less birdsong, more sounds of water, of rain. There are loud raindrops, the drips of collected water off leaves and gutters, and soft ones that fall directly on grass and paving. It is harder to hear the river over the sound of the rain. When the rain stops, though, the river is suddenly louder with its increased flow cutting through the quiet.

Geographers have talked about the ways rain, as well as other weather experiences and sensations, alters people's practices and their feelings of comfort. Eliza de Vet (2013, 2017) used photo diaries and serial interviews to look at weather practices in Darwin and Melbourne in Australia; the fine-grained ways people's days are shaped by weather experiences. Participants talked in detail about walking to work and waiting for weather to wash and dry clothes, of adding and removing layers of clothing, and myriad practices that emphasised the ways they altered their practices on a daily basis in response to weather.

There is a relational sense of agency here. People change their practices in response to weather, yet they also shape weather, creating micro-climates, with different clothes and with raincoats and houses and windows. So as Vannini et al (2012) points out, people move alongside atmospheric patterns, weaving their lives with weather, and seeking balance between self and place (see also Allen-Collinson 2018; Ingold 2008; Vannini and Austin 2020). Here, weather is not only a noun—a thing that exists out there—but also a verb; it is something we do. This is “to weather,” it is a process of weathering. For Vannini et al (2012: 361), “In the process of weathering, people make and remake dynamic places and selves in a performative ecology of movement.”

Experiences and practices of weather are not separate, then, from the affective and sensory self; they are part of the body and co-constitute a sense of subjectivity and identity. Weather is an active and important agent imbricated in processes of being in place, and of making ourselves with and as place and time. And our senses, the sensory experience, are so central to the ways we feel and practice this relationality: *Here comes the sun. It's warm and I feel a small prickle of sweat just*

lightly in my armpits and maybe my calves hidden under layers of thermals and tracksuit pants on this winter's day. I need to squint my eyes to look at the screen. Off comes the jumper, for now.

To weather, then, as a verb, expresses a mode of connection and endurance, of adaptation and manipulation, of reflection and change; connections that co-create place, time and self. Voices raised in the wind. Cold seeping through fingers. Sleeping close to the dog at night for warmth. In the wind, as we breathe, where do we begin and where do we end? Kaylynn Sullivan TwoTrees (2010) speaks of opening our awareness so that we may link our breath to the breath of the planet, the breathing of trees and plants, the breathing of the atmosphere with its breezes and winds, the cycles and rhythms of the earth and the moon. Our bodies are “an intimate and dynamic detail” in the Earth’s relational process.

Intimate and dynamic interrelations such as these shape so many of our decisions and actions. Consider the words of Eleanor, who moved to Tofino on Canada’s rainy West Coast from Toronto. Her quote comes from the article by Vannini et al (2012: 362). She says, “Let me tell you why I moved here”:

Here I have learned to live in relation to the weather. If it’s stormy I like to go out for a bike ride. When it’s dark and rainy I love to write, or read. If it’s windy I need to allow for a longer time for my kayak ride to work, from my float-house. If the sun is out for a long time, like it does in the summer, I need to figure out how I’m going to get water for my house because the creek I get water from starts to dry out. Dealing with the weather here is a way of facing life, a different kind of life. In the city it feels like you live regardless of the natural cycles of life. Here you try to find some kind of harmony with them. It’s not that the weather doesn’t affect you in the city. It’s just that by moving away from the city I moved away from a certain way of living with the weather, and with other people, and with my own self. Moving here was a choice for a different life. I wanted to learn to be somebody different, I wanted to live with a place and its weather instead of in spite of it. Even though I love the rain and I think of myself as a rain person, the weather isn’t always better than Toronto here. It sucks to have a sleepless night because the waves turn my float-house into a surfboard. But it’s just different. The place is different. I am different.

Weather, for Eleanor, is about self and how self changes with and as weather. It is about mobility and movement. From the big decision to move from Toronto, to the daily decisions of how much time to leave for a commute, to whether to go for a bike ride, to patterns of sleep, the movements of Eleanor’s subjectivity, her body, her routine are bound up with weather.

This speaks to weather’s essential mobility; to the ways that *to weather* implies movement, ongoing co-becomings, as bodies in and as place. Weather and weathering are never static—the contours of weather continually shift, are emergent through patterns both large and small. Vannini’s work foregrounds the ways

our sensory experiences of weather are made through and as movement (see also Saito 2005; Vannini and Vannini 2021). Weather moves, we move with it. And in its movement, weather asserts itself into and as our lives, our decisions, our sense of who and where we are. We are, as Berland (1993) says, our weather.

And, in this, of course, weather experiences are different for different people, in different places, with different subjectivities, inclusions and exclusions. Work in disability studies has been particularly active in this regard, pointing out the diverse ways that we live in, as and against weather (Bell et al 2018; MacPherson 2017). Mobility studies, for example, with people living in North America in the winter, such as those undertaken by Clarke et al (2015), Finlay (2018) and Lindsay and Yantzi (2014), point out that not only does weather mediate what people can and can't do, but that strategies for dealing with snow, for example, shift and are active; for those with disabilities in particular, there are always improvisations and tactics. And, more, there is a great deal of pride that people hold associated with their subjectivities of toughness and resilience as they navigate and indeed co-construct their lives in these places.

Dealing with weather is crucial to notions of self and identity. Consider, for example, a blog by Beth Shorthouse-Ullah, a woman living with multiple sclerosis (MS), whose sharings of MS through the seasons enrich the stories of genes and seasonal symptoms with which I began the chapter in ways that trace some of the mobile contours of her weathery realities. Her experiences of moving from fall to winter is different to mine. As she writes in her blog, *Falling into Fall: How the Changing Seasons Affect My MS Symptoms* (Ullah 2021):

As the days get colder and the mornings become frosty, I begin thinking about my mobility differently. Donning my fluffy boots and woolly socks means my numb feet have less contact with the ground than when it's warm and I can wear Dolly shoes with a thin sole. Last fall, I relied on my wheelchair more often, because being unable to feel the ground beneath my feet inevitably leads to falling...

The changing of the seasons brings me hope that things can change, evolve, adapt, and eventually flourish. It's the same with my MS. Each season, I have to adapt to and embrace the different ways I must manage my changing symptoms—and I wouldn't have it any other way.

Work in disability studies has long emphasised interdependence as a foundational reality of all bodies; pointing to our co-reliances on each other, and on and with place (Hall and Wilton 2017: 729). While ableist approaches may see such interdependencies and co-reliances as things to overcome, disability work points out that interdependence is simply a reality, a co-becoming which shapes both our practices and sense of self. Interdependence is something to centre as everyday experiences of identity and wellness and mobility come about through relationships with body and place and weather and each other.

And, in this way, we weather. It can be a gift to be open, to meet the world, to be the world. For Beth Shorthouse-Ullah, her adaptations and shifts with and

as weather, she says, are things she would not change.¹ These are some of the contours that rustle through our bodies. To witness, to attend to the communications, the movement and more-than-human voices, to absorb the changing light, respond to sound, to warmth are some of the rich multi-layered, bodily topologies of weather.

And the rain, the rain has sent my husband outside to bring in the washing. It's alleviating a little of the guilt I have—the sense that I should be outside doing something useful, feeling and living Country, working on the farm, rather than holed up in here working (lol!). The sounds of rain bundle me up, connect me to the page, send my reflections inward, making me more attuned to my body in this space; feeling snug, intimate. It's permission to give reign to my introversion. So, this is my body, my sense of self, my practices and bodily mobilities, and my temperature, my senses that allow a tangibility to the intra-actions that make me with/as the world. As I ponder the rain, tracing some of these contours, I am taken by the words of the late Professor John Hull, who began to progressively lose his sight as a teenager. He reflects upon the ways his vision shifts with rain, with the mist, reconfiguring his relationship with place and self. He says, of these weathery, bodily, sensory contours:

Rain has a way of bringing out the contours of everything: it throws a coloured blanket over previously invisible things; instead of an intermittent and thus fragmented world, the steadily falling rain creates continuity of acoustic experience The rain gives a sense of perspective and of the actual relationships of one part of the world to another. If only rain could fall inside a room, it would help me to understand where things are in that room, to give a sense of being in the room, instead of just sitting on a chair This is an experience of great beauty. I feel as if the world, which is veiled until I touch it, has suddenly disclosed itself to me Instead of having to worry about where my body will be and what it will meet, I am presented with a totality, a world which speaks to me.

(Hull 1990: 25–27)

Hot mess

First frosts have come

Oranges are juicy and ripe, morning grass crunchy underfoot

[Early June, early Winter]

Here, in my feelings of intimate snugness, I feel warm. This is not something I am used to. Indeed, I have different weather these days. I have spent most of my life being such a cold fish. I'm the one with the cold hands, the extra layer of clothes, first to get out of the ocean feeling cold even on a hot, sunny day. But these past few years have brought on first, peri-menopause, and then full-on menopause, and I find myself warmer. There are hot flushes, and there is also a noticeable lack of cold hands; sometimes I am wearing a t-shirt when those around me are looking

for a jacket. Rather than hankering for summer, I am enjoying this wintery weather, revelling in it. It's not just the planet, the weathery contours of my body are also experiencing warming.

There is a small region of the brain called the hypothalamus that is responsible both for pituitary hormone secretion and for body temperature (Santoro 2021). I have often marvelled at people who seem genuinely happy wearing shorts in winter, thinking how it's possible that, objectively, we are in the same air, but I am there in my puffy jacket and some bloke is rocking shorts and a singlet. I wondered, is it to do with a sense of beefy entitlement? Like, you are so wedded to a tough guy image, that your mind actually changes the signals to your body, saying, no worries, a singlet is just fine! Because the bloke did really seem warm enough and I really was cold. And then there is that feeling, when the first warm day of spring arrives, the very same temperature that would have you in a jacket in autumn has us stripping off layers in glee. These weathers of our body shift; they are in relationship with chemicals and synapses and bodily mechanisms, with a sense of self, with the experience of yesterday and tomorrow, with the seasons and so much more.

In this section now, I want to turn inwards a little more to my own body-as-weather; to the mobile bodily contours of weather that are me. I will trace a little of my changing weather, look to the topologies that are shifting with age and in concert with a shifting life, a shifting place, a shifting climate. These are different layers of mobilities and contours that layer on the movements and mobilities discussed by Vannini and de Vet; our internal weather-time.

The thing is, thanks to my hypothalamus among other things, I *am* hotter in the sense that I *feel* hotter these days. I do have hot flushes. I feel the sweat dripping off me at night, when it's cold, even freezing, outside. This is my body, in part, acting differently to produce its weather in new ways. The materiality of this weathering, the always-emergent processes of my mattering (Barad 2007), can be traced through some of the chemical processes at play in my more-than-human body. According to Santoro (2021), my body is acting to compensate for my lower ovarian production by activating certain neurons in the back of my brain with the intention of stimulating the release of additional oestrogen. These very neurons are linked to those that stimulate heat-loss mechanisms that regulate body temperature. So, as I try to manage my changing oestrogen levels, by signalling the need to produce more, I am also inadvertently signalling to my body that I am overheated. This is a form of dysregulation, a temporary one as the flush doesn't last long, of my thermoregulatory system. As a result, I feel hot, especially my face, my chest, my arms; my blood rushes to the surface of my skin; I sweat, my heart rate is up. There is a hell of a heat wave on/as my body! I say I am hot because I feel hot though it is likely that my basal body temperature is actually lower than it was before menopause. In complex ways, my climate and my weather are changing.

And so, it appears that the geography of my body is mobile. I am not only talking of my boobs going south, although that is a reality too, but also the experience of what it is like to live on/in/as my body as world. Because I am not the only being that lives in this body. There are changes too in the worlds of bacteria that experience my bodily weather in different ways. My gut, for example, home to a

rainforest of flora known as a microbiome, is likely under some pressure. My gut microbiome is that community of micro-organisms, the bacteria, archaea, fungi and viruses that resides in my digestive system (Shreiner et al 2015). This community is vast and differs widely from body to body, and through our lifetimes. The microbial cells in a human body exist in a roughly 1:1 ratio with our human cells. So, literally, our body is *half non-human*. And genetically speaking, microbial genes far outweigh human genes, by a factor of over 100:1. This reflects an extreme genetic diversity inside our guts; a world of weather in the digestive system where micro-organisms live and thrive and keep us alive.

And so, back to my changing weather and my changing internal weather systems, according to Peters et al (2022), research suggests that menopause is associated with a reduction in gut microbiome diversity in women. And, like the rainforest that I see from my window, a reduction in diversity, in turn, creates different weather, impacts the functioning of the body, my digestion, my mood, my central nervous system, my immunity, my health. So, its diversity both reflects the changing climate and helps create that change. There are cycles of climate in my gut, in my life, as my body. My weathery relationships, sensual, embodied, are relationships that flow both ways as my body is both changed by weather and, in turn, changes it, in its differential mattering and shifting bodily processes as well as through my shifting practices and mobilities.

My weather inside and out, permeates into itself; weather moves, infusing, emanating, connecting. The topologies have no strict boundaries. Those fungi in my gut are both me and not me. The weather is both outside and inside, with outside also complex (is bacteria living in my gut outside and yet within my gastrointestinal system? That is a topological question, a question of mobile shapes!). My body and its weathers come about through relationships rather than strict boundaries. And, the mechanisms are complex, poorly understood from a scientific perspective, little tended to by the social sciences or popular media. Indeed, despite my slightly authoritative-sounding explanations above, Kronenberg (2010), as well as many other researchers, point out that there is little understanding of the many and multiple processes at work in menopause. I wanted to give a sense of the specific interactions of chemicals and bacteria and temperature to make these material agents live in this story in more tangible ways yet, really, the interactions and relationships that create these changing weathers are us, yet also beyond us, beyond our understanding. And, importantly, weather is never just science or chemical mechanism: whether in terms of bodily contours or planetary wind systems, weather never stands outside culture and self and history and identity. Like other contours, this bodily heating system, these contours of bodily weather, are social and cultural and political in ways that are entirely imbricated with our intimate bodily experiences.

Different studies have worked to understand, for example, why Japanese women and those of Japanese heritage report experiencing fewer hot flushes and menopausal symptoms than non-Japanese heritage women in the United States and other Western countries. There are interesting intersecting explanations with no clear answers. Yes, a higher consumption of soy products, particularly in childhood tends

to shift mechanisms in the gut (our more-than-human friends in this story) in ways that mean oestrogen is produced and absorbed differently in soy-eating bodies, including many women from Japan whose lifetime diets tend to be relatively high in soy consumption (Korde et al 2009; Nagata et al 2001). Yet other factors interweave through this story—a tendency of traditional Chinese medicine, and its Japanese *Kampo* counterpart, to diagnose characteristics that might be associated with a hot flush differently for example (Kronenberg 2010; Wiseman and Feng 1998). Sweat and flushes and heart rates are associated with differently conceptualised bodily systems, and so are placed within different patterns of symptom presentation and understanding. A flush might be part of, according to Kronenberg, *fa han*, a sweat effusion, *mian jia chao hong*, a visible malar flush, or *fa re*, generalised sensation of heat, rather than part of a symptom set labelled “hot flush” by Western imagination. Then there are studies that look, for example, to women of Japanese and European descent, living in the United States (Brown et al 2009). Here, self-reported incidents of menopausal symptoms were lower for Japanese-heritage women while the physical medical monitoring tended to show no difference with the control group. This speaks potentially to different tolerances, different tendencies to share, different approaches to diarising, different priorities, different experiences with health systems that respond differently to differently racialised bodies. All of these factors mean different weathers. For those women of Japanese heritage, their weather really is different because they feel it is. Like me feeling warmer than in my youth even if my basal temperature is probably lower; like the bloke in the t-shirt, we’re weathering differently in complex social/cultural/physical ways.

And there is, in the self-reporting and self-experience of menopause’s weather, a reality that the literature, particularly popular science accounts and mainstream understandings of menopause, are redolent with a host of regressive, social Darwinian explanations, thick with assumptions of sexless, cranky and hopeless old women, of a woman’s primary, even sole role as a child bearer or rearer, and of genetic predilections of men to want young women, of grandmothers needed to raise young children and more. There is little doubt that social and cultural understandings of menopause, particularly in Westernised/modernist contexts, have tended to be negative, associated with a loss of desirability, mental and physical strength. To be honest, this irks me. It’s little wonder that some women respond by not wanting to air these processes, to open themselves to such judgement, assumptions and critique. DeLyser and Shaw (2013) aptly and compellingly summarise menopause in the literature pointing out that:

...menopause is a social, cultural and geographical issue that, until now, has remained the domain of science. As with other matters concerning women and life stages, such as once was the case with pregnancy and birth, menopause remains medicalised and untheorised. It lingers, even pathologised as a mental illness, lumped in with women as “hysterics” or those who need a “mother’s little helper” pill to get through the day. Women are told that as we become older, and hormones decline, our sexual attractiveness diminishes—particularly to men....

Women are expected to slide into some form of asexual grandmotherhood with no further role in life. But even casual analysis reveals that none of this applies to so many menopausal women around the world—and it does not apply to us. There. We have spoken the unspeakable, and spoken it about ourselves. Will we now be tarred with the climacteric brush? We hereby out ourselves—we are menopausal women who seek to move ourselves and our geographical understandings of menopause beyond biologically determined functionalism. Who will join our efforts and answer our call for menopause geographies?

Here, this term climacteric seems very apt. Although, Shaw and de Lyster are understandably reluctant to claim the climacteric camp, I am less sure. I'm feeling my weather and climate is changing in some fundamental complex social-cultural-more-than-human ways. Some of which I am certainly celebrating. Why not climacteric? Climacteric (klaɪ 'makt(ə)rɪk) works as a noun and an adjective. Here is the definition from the *Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Modern English*:²

Noun

- A critical period or event;
- The period of life when fertility and sexual activity are in decline: (in women) menopause;
- The ripening period of certain fruits such as apples, involving increased metabolism and only possible while still on the tree.

Adjective

- Having extreme and far-reaching implications or results: critical;
- Occurring at, characteristic of, or undergoing the climacteric: (in women) menopausal;
- (Of a fruit) undergoing a climacteric.

Much of that does speak to my weather in ways I think important—far-reaching change, a critical period here. I am a ripe fruit, an orange after the frost, juicy now (still on the tree, you hear me!), a point of crux and change, a shift in my weather in entangled sciency and culturally and politically and personally ways. This microseason of ripe oranges that I am in as I write, and the one when the apples come on too, is deeply valued by our family and by the many parrots and cockatoos that visit. It's abundance at a time when much else of the garden is frosted over. It's vitamin C and health-giving juice when colds and flu tend to be around. It's a reason to be out in the wintery weather, walking over the crunchy frosty ground to the orange trees. Where would we be without this? Ripe can be the effect of a fulsome, valued experience. I am climacteric and weathery.

Speaking of climacteric, and of those tensions and shifting relationships between fertility and desire, of anger and activism, of complex bodily realities, of humour and straight talking, a performance piece by Mercilee Jenkins is a

rare exploration of menopause, and along with a range of commentaries in *Text and Performance Quarterly*, a rare theoretical consideration of the ways we weather differently as we age (Barnes 2005; Jenkins 2005; Logan 2005; Pelias 2005). Here, Jenkins charts some of the geographies of her middle age body including a moving monologue around surviving breast cancer and a spicy dialogue between menopause and desire. She powerfully takes the audience on a journey of some of her shifting contours, her own “changes of life” that include a sense of her history and activism, her journey of queer community, love and desire, a sharing of pain, humour and the sense of her own futurity and shifting self-knowing. Weathers of vaginal dryness and gut are bound with the energies of desire, held together, in this case, with a feather boa, sharing secrets and dialogue as a conundrum, a humorous and camp performance called, “Dialogue with Menopause and Desire.” Desire is a stereotypical sexpot, menopause a stereotypically dried up and post-sexual woman so that the performer’s and readers’ consciousnesses are doubled up, bifurcated, in dialogue, tension, contradiction, through witty repartee in ways that, as Christie Logan points out using Eve Sedgwick’s phrase (1993), are “kinda subversive, kinda hegemonic” (p. 287).

Through this whole piece, Jenkins invites us into some internal dialogue, sassy and complex interweavings, including of politics and pain. At one point of the dialogue between Menopause and Desire, Desire snips, “Please, don’t bore me with your medical history. That’s not why I’m here.”

Menopause insists the dry (pun intended) description of her body’s changes is important, yet of course it is far from the full story. Desire prods menopause until she concedes she is here because she feels restless because the pressure in the barometer is dropping. Because there is a change, climacteric. And yes, everyone is different as Desire points out. And we all long; it is part of our being-longing, our belonging (Wright 2015). Although Menopause denies it, Desire says “You need something to long for.” And Desire is right here. For Menopause longs for something different, maybe it is sexual and maybe it is not.

For me, these changing weathers are notable. Some longed for, some dreaded. And they are my body and my self, my life and my mood. Indeed, part of the climacteric changes for all women are changes in mood. This is why Menopause, for Jenkins, is cranky and serious, yes. The Australasian Menopause Society puts it thus:³

The clinical presentation of depression/mood disturbance at the menopause transition may be unique, with less sadness, increased anger, irritability and paranoia which can fluctuate in severity compared to younger women. Many symptoms overlap; difficulties with sleep, concentration, energy and libido could be attributed to classic depressive symptoms or, equally, to mood disturbance related to the menopausal transition.

And so, yes, as the Australasian Menopause Society puts it, there is an increase in anger. For me, I think, it’s about bloody time. Finally, time to shed some of the



Figure 5.1 Hot Mess. Photo: Matt Webb

relentless people-pleasing. Enough of putting up with and smoothing over. It is time for anger, for irritability. Some may not, but I embrace aspects of this impending storm; I am actively encouraging myself to weather a lot of the world's shit differently. For me, this manifests in part through a sense, as I might say, of less fucks given. In particular, it's expressed in forming a women's punk rock band with two dear friends. As Pelias (2005: 293) says of Jenkins work, "You know the sassy, seductive power of dancing when you are free." In my case, the dance is quite feisty. We call our punk band Hot Mess and we are weathering our climacteric loudly (see Figure 5.1).

One song, *Peacemaker*, makes it clear that the time for trying to compensate for the bad behaviour of others is past. For the heat of menopause encourages us to weather relationships differently:

Peacemaker (words by Jo Ware, the band's drummer)⁴

*You're angry? Well get over it!
 Don't make me endure
 You've had your little dummy spit
 Now get up off the floor.
 I'm not your scapegoat
 I am not your crutch
 No more smoothing over
 Thanks very fucking much
 I won't be your peacemaker
 Not anymore
 I am not your peacemaker
 I'll show you the door
 You wanna see angry?
 Then watch me ROAR!*

And we are out there, letting it be known. We played a set at the Buluunggal Festival (without swear words), invited by Uncle Bud who loves the band, and it felt good to see people dancing, laughing, weathering some of those contours together. We played at the People's Blockade at Newcastle too, a 30-hour protest of civil disobedience and blockade of the world's biggest coal port, right here where my university sits in Awabakal and Worimi Country.⁵ These blockades, protests and assertions are not obstructions but rather a chance to protect and assert multiples futures, of/with our singing/yelling, dancing and blockading bodies (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua 2017).

Weathery topologies

Shortest day is here

Long shadows across the paddock in the early afternoon

[Late June, Winter Solstice]

The weathery topologies of my body shift. I am angry, more often assertive although still, mostly, polite (sorry) and often funny. I experience "mood disturbance." I shift my practices. My genetic expression changes, spiralling with seasons and through my ageing body. While all of this is a matter of weathering, an intra-action within my body and between myself and those forces, beings, processes that are relationally produced with and as me, clearly not all of this is beautiful nor positive. The long shadows of this short day teach us this.

Importantly, contours of bodies follow different traces and are shaped differently through racist and capitalist and colonial relations. So, I speak of anger and menopause with an awareness that an angry white woman may be perceived in certain ways—over-entitled annoying old woman who should take up jazzercise? But also, maybe, bravely speaking out, someone to be listened to in their anger as they finally shed the tyranny of pliability?—while an angry black woman may be perceived very differently—as, well, angry. These politics of anger and differential experience have been so powerfully pointed out by many Black and Indigenous academics, activists and other leaders (Motta 2016; Msimang 2022; Tongs 2022). And there is class in there too so that contours may diverge according more of the harridan or crazy person, and less of the courageous warrior to a working-class woman, all the more intensely so if that woman is racialised. As Divya Tolia-Kelly (2006: 215) points out, "A body that is signified as a source of fear through its markedness cannot be free to affect and be affected similarly to one that is not."

So, it is important that with my enthusiasm for digging a little more into the intimate bodily processes through which weather makes/is our bodies, I do not err too far into a framing that strips the politics from these processes. Explanations for how genes may switch on and off around MS that look to air pollution and diet may appear so very dry and politics-free but all, really, are laden with power. The patterns of experience and explanation are racialised and classed and gendered. They encompass, among other things, questions

about who lives in polluted air and why, who may eat certain things and why, who may be diagnosed and treated in certain ways and why. Through weather, and how we weather, these processes are brought home—including home to/as our bodies (Tuana 2008).

As I have looked to the weathery contours of bodies, I do this with an explicit recognition that all bodies are situated differently within and as weather, and within and as climate change. The very notion that climate change might be abstract, that the shifts of weather might be new, that there might be an orderliness to life that might be disrupted, is a reflection of privilege. It is a privilege that might see weather as always “outside,” that there is a flat and linear temporality associated with a well-behaved weather that does not impinge on the realities of existence (see, for example, Neimanis and Walker 2014). Those unhoused or poorly housed know full well that the weather is not *out there*.

We are all always weathering, and the ways we weather are so deeply connected to our positionality. This is something pointed out by Jennifer Hamilton and Astrida Neimanis (2018) in their “Field Guide to weathering” who, in the introduction to their field guide say, “our capacity to weather is conditioned by personal as well as social, political, cultural and economic circumstances. Weather, and weathering, is never neutral” (p. 44).

Their field guide shares some “embodied tactics” for two or more humans. After some introductory questions, for example, that ask—*What is climate change for you? What is weather for you? Notice the ambient weather conditions today. Is climate change here? How? Where?*—the guide seeks deeper reflection of how this is embodied, with a lucky dip of playful yet reflexive questions that seek to understand, *How do we understand weather—according to which bodily sensoria, cultural frames, temporal and spatial scales? How might our understanding of weather shift if we loosen and interrupt its quotidian frames of reference?*

It is not only how we understand weather, it is how we experience it, how we are it, how it is us in ways that become meaningful through differential and complex processes of weathering including over time (Yusoff 2018). As is clear through the field guide, even at the bodily contours of a micro-scale, attention is needed to the intimate politics of weather and weathering, to some politics of the body and weather that have enabled racist, ableist, sexist and colonising weathery realities. Our co-emergences with/as weather have to be understood in the context of the power geometries, the shifting yet also pernicious topologies of power that shape our social/cultural/physical world.

Hamilton and Neimanis (2018) delve into these processes through a feminist lens, pointing out that climate change is a form of mutual-worlding, of weather and human bodies, and I would add Country, as a common space and a conjoined time. Weathering is a process of intra-action, action from within relations that come about through a “differential processes of mattering” (Barad 2007: 140; see also Alaimo 2008; Barry et al 2020). And these differential processes are differentiated differently.

These processes are what makes us. And this cannot be disentangled. As Astrida Neimanis and Rachel Walker (2014) point out, discussing their experience of hayfever:

[I]n a world of intra-activity the *hay-feverish body* cannot be *traced back*. It was not once an autonomous body whose borders have been breached, but rather an expression of transcorporeal collaboration as plant and human orifices together weather a season's change. The body (a human body, a gust of wind, striations of rock) can no longer be understood as an autonomous entity, unaffected by (and ineffectual in) its environment.

(p. 565)

So our bodies are made with place, time, weather as Country. Country makes us in ways material, political, intimate and all entwined, relationally. These are the embodied and intimate relationships of Milpirri too. Steve Wanta Jampijinpa Patrick (2015), as he elaborates on some of the relationalities and dynamics of Milpirri, tells us that our intimate selves are made through our place and sense of home which are, in turn, produced through relations of Family, Law, Land, Language and Ceremony. If we lose any of these connections, we become feral, unknown to Country, unknown to ourselves. So, coming into Milpirri, coming out of the storm cloud means nourishing the ways our bodies are weather, are place, are relationship and connection. It means tending to positionality and the worlds of weather in/as us. Weather's movements and co-constituent beings move us and make us; they shape and re-make our sense of self. Weather is not only outside or up in the air, it never exists separately to culture, identity, politics. Neither does Milpirri. If we miss this, we miss the chance to really care for ourselves and for Country.

Conclusion

Magnolia in bloom, azaleas in bud
Beautiful riotous colour in the fresh winter days
 [Early July, mid-Winter]

Tracing contours of the body speaks deeply to co-becoming: from the microflora of our gut and the genes that switch on and off with weather to the ways our sense of self, our feelings, mobilities, sensory landscapes, shift. These are our intimate weatherings. Indeed, our sensory, embodied experiences of/as weather are some of the most intimate ways of how we are in the world. The weather shapes, makes, guides, connects, reveals and obscures in ways that work at once within us, beyond us and, perhaps most importantly, in ways that connect and co-constitute us with and as place and time. It is in smell and sight and emotion and memory, in blood and cells and skin.

Bodily contours of weather, too, speak to porosity. Weather, like the air, seeps in and out, making us in the lining of lungs, in the growth of bacteria, the shedding of cells. Weather underscores the porosity of our bodies, the lack of rigid boundaries, as heat transfers through convection, radiation, evaporation, conduction from our skin to the air, and as pressure gradients inside and out hold our viscera in place; these processes are part of the making of our diversely intimate selves. And we feel it too. Standing in the midst of the magnolia tree, in this microseason of bright flowers, the light refracting off the blooms on the tree and where they have fallen to make a carpet on the ground, fills body and soul; it's like I'm dancing in a cloud. The fresh gentle smell of winter passes with my breath through my nose, to my brain; resonating and creating memories and self. In the most intimate way, we are actively made and unmade by weather. These are our embodied realities as co-becoming.

To find weather, we do not only look out, we do not need to seek only the future or the past. Rather, as I have tried to explore in this chapter, weather is experienced and made through material, bodily responses and rhythms; feelings, bodies, senses, practices, chemical processes are intimately co-constituted with and as weather. For our emotions and sensory experiences of the world are in and of, and in relationship with, our bodies and the bodies of others also.

There are material as well as transcendental ways that buluunggal's journey continues inside us, the ways the storm cloud is at once within and without. Uncle Bud, in the previous chapter spoke of memory and meaning, of the Old Fellas guiding him through Country through his senses, feelings, and internal knowings. Those Old Fellas linger too in his DNA. And there is us eating buluunggal at the barbeque, a loop of a spiral complete as the fish in our stomach literally co-becomes with our bodies. It meets my gut flora, my internal rainforest, its energy heats and cools me, keeps me alive. So self and place and time, these inner and outer contours of weather are layers that make us, together.

This brings another layer to understandings of co-becoming. Weather and climate change and Country are not ever out there, they are always part of who we are. In this chapter I have looked at how this is expressed through material processes of more-than-human co-becoming including through and as our bodies. I have also dwelled upon how these material processes are, in fact, more than material, imbricated and produced through social and cultural and personal embodied sets of intra-relations. Understanding the body's contours of weather enriches ideas of responsibility-as, bringing it ever closer to home, inside our most intimate selves, our embodied realities. Our weathers are different, yet they are in connection. They come together as warm and cold air meeting in a thundercloud. We can turn towards relationality, from our place and always acknowledging difference, into Milpirri, to attend with care to the transcorporeal worlds that we share.

Notes

- 1 See her blog *Through the Looking Glass* for her reflections at <https://multiplesclerosisnewstoday.com/through-the-looking-glass-beth-shorthouse-ullah/>
- 2 "Climacteric." *The Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English*. Retrieved 18 November 2023 from Encyclopedia.com: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/climacteric-0>

- 3 <https://www.menopause.org.au/hp/information-sheets/mood-and-the-menopause>
- 4 Hot Mess links if you want to check us out: On Bandcamp [<https://hot-mess.bandcamp.com/>], on Spotify [https://open.spotify.com/artist/3wo86mUxzGYhvUdMSW9WVvk?si=BZNtDx_NQYqzJM0EGWRkgw], on Facebook [<https://www.facebook.com/hot.mess.bellingen.feminist.punk?mibextid=ZbWKwL>] or on Instagram [https://instagram.com/___h_o_t_m_e_s_s___?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==]
- 5 <https://www.risingtide.org.au/blockade>