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Longing for Clouds - Does Beautiful Weather have to be Fine?

Mădălina Diaconu

Abstract

Any attempt to outline a meteorological aesthetics centered on so-called beautiful weather has to overcome several difficulties: In everyday life, the appreciation of the weather is mostly related to practical interests or reduced to the ideal of stereotypical fine weather that is conceived according to blue-sky thinking irrespective of climate diversity. Also, an aesthetics of fine weather seems, strictly speaking, to be impossible given that such weather conditions usually allow humans to focus on aspects other than weather, which contradicts the autotelic character of beauty. The unreflective equation of beautiful weather with moderately sunny weather and a cloudless sky also collides with the psychological need for variation: even living in a "paradise" climate would be condemned to end in monotony. Finally, whereas fine weather is related in modern realistic literature to cosmic harmony and a universal natural order, contemporary literary examples show that in the age of the climate change, fine weather may be deceitful and its passive contemplation, irresponsible. This implies the necessity of a reflective aesthetic attitude on weather, as influenced by art, literature, and science, which discovers the poetics of bad weather and the wonder that underlies average weather conditions.

Key Words

climate change, environmental aesthetics, literature, weather

"Despite Shakespeare, clouds are never ugly."^[1]

1. The beauty of the weather: between clichés and relativism

Like politics or sports, weather is a matter of general interest, however it doesn't cause disagreements. *De gustibus disputandum, sed de tempestate non disputandum est* because who would be disposed to argue about the weather? Weather does not split communities, but it does not build them either. If we do not dispute weather, do we really discuss it? A writer describes the weather only when she has nothing else to write about, just like when one speaks about weather if one has nothing to say, remarked Tolstoy.^[2] Besides, it is commonly assumed that this topic can be handled quite "objectively:" we are convinced that we all know how fine weather has to look: sunny, mostly cloudless, with moderate temperature, and average humidity, possibly with a light breeze. The fact that this representation may be confined to regions with a temperate, continental climate is usually overlooked, and the dwellers' of the desert longing for thick cloudscapes that promise rain or their exuberant reaction to snow rather cause disconcertment and amusement than

challenge the cliché about how fine weather should be. Not even our own yearning for "bad" weather in times of a prolonged drought does not dispel the stereotype of the ideal weather as sunny. But do beautiful and fine weather have to be synonymous? For example, fine weather is always good *for something*, mostly for someone's activity outdoors, be it agriculture, transport, road repair, or sport. And there is no particular weather that would suit all practical purposes; in other words, "weather is always unfair."^[3]

As frequently as everyday life is permeated by small talk on weather, as deep is the silence on it in aesthetic theory, given its aesthetic impurity and complexity. The appreciation of weather conditions is linked to vital and ethical values and embedded in various cultural contexts. Therefore, in order to be able to achieve aesthetic appreciation of weather conditions, the subject has not only to free herself from any practical interests, with their corresponding practices, ranging from magical conjuring of rain to geo-engineering, but also to overcome any presumable meteo-dependency, which makes the appreciation of weather depend on physiological criteria of corporeal and emotional well-being.

Moreover, the multisensory dimension of weather contradicts the priority of the so-called "theoretical senses"^[4] of sight and hearing in modern aesthetics. These are also the senses that allow the subject to perceive a phenomenon from a safe position without exposing her to extremely uncomfortable or even dangerous situations. As Kant emphasized, in cases of turbulent weather conditions, a complicated *dispositif* is required to alleviate spontaneous fear in the subject with the discovery of the source of the sublime and enable an indirect aesthetic satisfaction.^[5] For a long time, weather and extraordinary celestial phenomena were not free from mythic, religious, and mantic interpretations, and fear was stronger than awe. Even in our times, the practical function of the weather forecast still takes precedence over aesthetic admiration.

To put it roughly, weather is far too complex and subjective for traditional aesthetics of natural beauty, and even in art it remains a minor topic, coming to the fore only in landscape painting. In sum, one either identifies beautiful weather too hastily as the cliché of fine weather in their own climate, which makes any further aesthetic analysis pointless, or one has to be willing to engage in an endless discussion on how relative are the ideals of weather in various climates worldwide. In both cases, the issue of what beautiful weather really is seems to discourage from the outset any possibility of fruitful aesthetic analysis.

2. Cloudscapes and earthscapes

And still, attempts have been undertaken recently by Arnold Berleant,^[6] Holmes Rolston III,^[7] and David Macauley^[8] to introduce a "celestial," "meteorological," and "aerial" aesthetics, while the "aerographic" descriptions in the field of material geography are not exempt from aesthetic implications.^[9] Strikingly enough, several of these authors focus precisely on experiences of what is commonly called bad weather related to clouds, rain, fog, and snow. For example, Rolston emphasizes the fluctuation of weather conditions in

comparison with the regularities of the climate: "This sky is reconstructed daily, even hourly."^[10] Also his polemic against the blue-sky thinking is meant to defend the clouds as aesthetically stimulating: cloudwatching evokes a broader range of moods than the awe and wonder that accompany the usual examples of watching the stars or sunsets.

In contrast to other celestial events that were prone to mythological interpretations, the contemplation of cloudscapes is closest to the ideal type of an aesthetic experience and generates an aesthetic attitude at three levels, at least. First, the observer draws enjoyment from the pure play of forms, textures, and colors. Also, one is attuned to the various moods and emotional atmospheres suggested by the ever-changing cloudscapes. The ongoing metamorphosis of the sky leaves imprints on "moodscape" as inner landscapes. This mutability, which Goethe once called the *drama* of the clouds, entitles the beholder to assign a capricious or "moody" temper to the weather: the mobility and fluidity of cloudscapes are a reflection of life.

Finally, the sky serves as a screen for imaginative projections; clouds improvise abundantly and the game of recognizing objects or animals in cumulus clouds is as enjoyable for children as it is for adults. The aesthetic enjoyment originates in this case from the surprising analogies one is able to detect between extraterrestrial space and earth. Even Aristotle explained the pleasure humans draw from *mimesis* through the cognitive mechanism of recognition.^[11] The less one can presume an intentional author behind a seemingly meaningful form, the stronger is the enjoyment. According to Martin Steel, these three aspects configure nature as a space of sensory contemplation, as a place of affective correspondences, and as a stage for imagination.^[12] In addition to this, in cultural history clouds often symbolized freedom, doom, or the disguised presence of the divine.^[13]

Cloudwatching is a gratifying occupation as much for the daydreamers' disinterested attention as for the scientists' keen observation; sometimes both "souls" dwell in a single person, if we think of Goethe. In our day such cloud-lovers founded the Cloud Appreciation Society, whose members are spread all over the world. Its manifesto says:

We believe that clouds are unjustly maligned and that life would be immeasurably poorer without them. We think that they are Nature's poetry, and the most egalitarian of her displays, since everyone can have a fantastic view of them. We pledge to fight 'blue-sky thinking' wherever we find it. Life would be dull if we had to look up at cloudless monotony day after day. We seek to remind people that clouds are expressions of the atmosphere's moods, and can be read like those of a person's countenance. Clouds are so commonplace that their beauty is often overlooked. They are for dreamers and their contemplation benefits the soul.^[14]

Modern air transport makes it possible to see clouds also from the air. Cloudwatching from below and the aerial photography of earthscapes imply opposite perspectives, the photographer

having her "head in the clouds" in two different ways. They imply different weather conditions, as well, given that pictures of earthscapes can mostly be taken in "fine," cloudless weather. And this brings me to another difficulty in outlining an aesthetics of what is called fine weather: the physical atmosphere in general is the medium of life, and as a medium, is mostly ignored and is only noticed when it contradicts its function. Indeed, the atmospheric conditions of so-called fine weather correspond optimally to the medial character of weather, which tends to become inconspicuous in three ways:

First, it has a mostly average positive effect on the subject's well-being. Only the effect of contrast, as when sunny weather interrupts a long period of rainy, stormy, or gloomy days, may enhance the feeling of how fine sunny weather really is.

Second, in terms of perception, fine weather does not require any particular physical adaptation. Above all, it makes possible the greatest visibility of earthly phenomena. Therefore, to enjoy the weather often means to enjoy the view of wide landscapes and waterscapes, to take pleasure in panoramas from the top of a mountain, or to look down at remote earthscapes from a plane, but not to enjoy the weather *for itself*.

And third, because of this corporeal comfort and visual facilitation, fine weather enables humans to carry out their everyday activities and simply ignore what is "up in the air:" fine weather is often fine just because we take notice of it only to forget it in the next moment. And this leads to the following paradox: in everyday life, the best weather appears to be the weather *one does not become aware of*, and conceals itself as a *medium of life*, and a *frame for practices*.

Psychologically speaking, fine weather corresponds to a kind of point zero of experience that tends to pass for normal and therefore is ignored. For this reason, an aesthetics of fine weather appears to be *de facto* impossible as a *meteorological* aesthetics because of its centrifugal aspect: ideal weather is seldom enjoyed in itself, but mostly throws one constantly outside the weather to what "really counts." To put it differently, ascribing beauty to fine weather would contradict the autotelic character of beauty, being a means for something different, for the subject's well-being, perception, and life in general.

On the contrary, it seems easier from this perspective to pay attention and even to contemplate aesthetically the deviations from this "point zero" of our experience of meteorological events. When fog, rain, or snow – all earthly epiphenomena of the clouds – make us feel stricken, blur the image of the world, and keep us from abandoning ourselves to outdoor activities, the weather compels our attention. At the same time, "bad" weather conditions also influence the perception of what is seen through or, rather, behind them and change the classical beauty of clearly designed landscapes into a rather romantic beauty of scenes that emanate atmospheres and shape different moodscapes.

Emile Cioran, David Le Breton, and Georges Perec, to name

just a few essayists, were all sensitive to the poetic dimension of what common sense calls bad weather.^[15] For example, Cioran, who was well-known for his radical pessimism, wandered for hours in foggy weather and proclaimed the fog as "the only thing which has never disappointed me, the most beautiful achievement on the surface of the earth."^[16] More recently, a journey through fog-bound shoreline motivated Craig Martin to reflect on how the opacity of fog temporarily "confiscates the horizon" and causes disorientation.^[17]

Nevertheless, it is precisely this visual obstruction that brings into light the relation usually neglected between vision and the "embodied immersion in aerial space."^[18] In phenomenological terms, the experience of wandering amidst the fog enhances the awareness of being-in-the-world and being entangled bodily with the world, instead of assuming a disembodied subject who would watch it from a position outside the world. The absence of such experiences of atmospheric phenomena in phenomenology therefore appears all the more surprising with the notable exception of Luce Irigaray.^[19]

Also, when the clouds settle on earth as fog, the obstruction of visibility compels the subject to acknowledge that the air is always in-between the seer and the object and, although it usually remains invisible, it is a *material* medium of perception. The atmospheric phenomena of fog, rain, and snow, no less than the clouds, as "phenomena situated broadly between air and water on an elemental perceptual scale,"^[20] make the air that is saturated with humidity "come out" into the realm of visibility. The aerial space becomes itself a phenomenon and this is the primary condition for the possibility of its aesthetic theory.

3. The natural order, between paradise and apocalypse

However, one may argue that deviations from the general "taste" for fine weather concern individual *preferences* rather than the *description* of the weather conditions. *How* fine weather should be cannot cause any divergence of opinions. The universal character of ideal weather seems to find confirmation in Saint Ephrem the Syrian's vision of paradise.^[21] In his fictitious meteorology, the atmosphere is "temperate," without any significant variations throughout the year, and provides optimal conditions for the fertility of the soil. Also "the months' tempests are overcome" so that they cannot "pollute the glorious air."^[22] Surprisingly enough, this constant weather is conceived in analogy to chastity, while the instability of the weather on Earth suggests a disordered sexual life. Just like the Christian moral ideal proposes to defeat passions in order to achieve *apatheia* or serenity, the weather in Eden excludes any "harmful frost" or "scorching heat."^[23]

It is now time to ask whether this ideal of climate has changed since the fourth century. Is the modern tourist's "pilgrimage" from the northern half of the globe to the climatically "blessed" countries of the south different, in essence, from travel to a climatic paradise? A meteorological aesthetics is apparently not subject to any historical evolution. To consider fine weather banal and to warn that the tourist's delightful consumption of never changing fine weather would necessarily

end in boredom are still exceptions, if not explicit provocations, as in the following statement by F. C. Delius: "I do not understand why the Caribbean is such a desirable place. Three weeks of nothing but sunshine, alright, but to have this the whole year? This would be a nightmare for me."[\[24\]](#) The situatedness of his own attitude, used to the variety of the European climate, is left unquestioned again, as is usual in issues related to the weather.

As a matter of fact, fine weather nowadays could turn into a nightmare in other respects, as well. We have lost any innocence concerning the weather and, after having tasted from the tree of knowledge, face scientists' alarm that fine weather may be a treacherous sign of global warming. The parameters of fine weather are indeed far from being the same everywhere; permanent sunshine and mild weather at the poles should alert rather than delight us. Fine weather has come under suspicion, and climate change opened a second age of bad conscience after Christianity.

We all know that fine weather here may be compensated by desertification, floods, and hurricanes elsewhere, and there is no doubt that weather conditions are local. They can strongly vary within a small area, but belong nevertheless to a complex global system that shows no respect for political borders or economic interests. To follow Delius once more, humanity has always imagined the apocalypse as tremendously severe weather, but the real end of the world may come, on the contrary, in fine weather. This could be a thrilling literary topic waiting to be developed.[\[25\]](#)

In modern realistic literature, the description of weather conditions generally introduces the presentation of characters and narrative episodes. The meteorological aspects specify the *moment* of an action and serve as a parergon, accessory, or frame for the narrative. It's typical for the realistic novel to place such a meteorological description at the beginning of a story line, as in Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*, where he resorts surprisingly to the scientific language of meteorology in order to describe a fine day:

There was a depression over the Atlantic. It was travelling eastwards, towards an area of high pressure over Russia, and still showed no tendency to move northwards around it. The isotherms and isotheres were fulfilling their functions. The atmospheric temperature was in proper relation to the average annual temperature, the temperature of the coldest as well as of the hottest month, and the a-periodic monthly variation in temperature. The rising and setting of the sun and of the moon, the phases of the moon, Venus and Saturn's rings, and many other important phenomena, were in accordance with the forecasts in the astronomical yearbooks. The vapour in the air was at its highest tension, and the moisture in the air was at its lowest. In short, to use an expression that describes the facts pretty satisfactorily, even though it is somewhat old-fashioned: it was a fine August day in the year 1913.[\[26\]](#)

Weather, however, rarely provides a neutral frame for narration, usually "each author builds his own sky."^[27] In Romanticism, weather descriptions evoke emotional atmospheres and are projections of the characters' moods. Realistic writers prefer to indirectly invest weather with meaning; finally, severe weather conditions and natural catastrophes trigger actions and give the protagonists the opportunity to unravel their real "nature" in spectacular, heroic gestures. In the first two cases, weather expresses the consonance between the protagonist and nature; in the third case, weather plays the role of a narrative agent and is mostly opposed to human interests. All three situations require the reader's empathic response and imply specific values.

Even in so-called *bürgerlicher Realismus* the author manipulates weather conditions in order to indirectly transmit a set of values and conventions to the reader. According to Delius, weather mantles a specific ideology: it makes the fictitious reality comprehensible and suggests the existence of a transcendental ethical counterpart of the human actions, which consists in a cosmic harmony and order. His analysis of the relationship between "the hero and his weather" in about sixty German realistic novels from the second half of the nineteenth century gives evidence that good weather always confirms the triumph of virtuous characters and accompanies a happy destiny, while unsettled and stormy weather is appropriate to immoral acts and vicious characters.

On the whole, this *Weltanschauung* builds a closed universe in which the sky reflects the events below and occasionally even influences the course of human action. This literary strategy expresses a certain need to transcend the human dimension of action without resorting to mythological or religious forces.

The sky is idealized to represent a higher order in a secularized society; weather makes the ethical order seem natural and constructs its own "mythology of the universal."^[28]

The ideological message of the weather to the reader is double. Either the social relationships are endorsed by an extra-social order and naturalized so that the narrative enables the reader to feel secure in a rational, almost Hegelian world and prompts them to accept the social order to receive full gratification. Or the social critique is rejected and replaced by withdrawal into inwardness, which is also Kierkegaard's term for subjectivity. The first way leads to social conformism and the idealization of obedience; the second one ends in alienation and inner exile. Yet in both forms, such novels suggest a higher harmony and eventually fulfill the reader's expectations.

Delius, who published his book in the 1970s, is still convinced that extensive weather descriptions and the literary techniques of harmonizing weather and characters have been exhausted in modern literature, and that they have survived only in its popular genres. On the contrary, the modern German *Hochroman* prefers to parody and satirize the former conventional use of weather or to describe the atmospheric phenomena in an impersonal, almost scientific manner, independently of the action. If references to the weather conditions are not simply missing, they are generally concise

and confined to stereotypes. The authors avoid any mythological connotations of weather events and undermine the reader's unconscious impulse to develop empathy. Delius' opinion of the current irrelevance of weather is shared by another critic, Iris Radisch, who regrets the disappearance of weather subjects in German contemporary literature.^[29] Still, this opinion has to be revised in light of the writers' recently renewed interest in the climate change.

While the realistic writers of the nineteenth century generally draw a parallel between beautiful weather and the protagonist's happiness and success, fine sunny weather is seldom used in literature as a contrasting background for tragic episodes. Still, fine weather may conceal traps, like in Jean Paul's *Des Luftschiffers Giannozzo Seebuch*, in which the air traveler escapes thunder-storms only to succumb absurdly to lightning on a fine day. Also, in J. D. Salinger's short story, *A Perfect Day for Bananafish*, nothing in the air or in the hero's behavior announces his suicide.^[30] The fine weather, along with the alert style and arresting dialogues, catches the reader's attention and completely conceals the character's emotional disorder.

In our day, vivid discussion about the greenhouse effect has also engaged writers and scriptwriters; booming doomsday scenarios bespeak what John Urry called "the new catastrophism" or "epochalism."^[31] From the list of recent eco-thrillers, let me consider here Ilija Trojanow's *EisTau*.^[32] The protagonist of the novel, Zeno, is a researcher of glaciers who falls into despair after watching the end of a glacier in the Alps. Like Jean Paul's "astronaut," he keeps a log on a cruise to the Antarctic on which he is an expedition leader, and delivers scientific lectures to guests who do not wish to listen to his warnings of climatic collapse.

Also like Giannozzo, Zeno seeks for a refuge from an irresponsible society but, in contrast to his predecessor, he cannot escape his human compatriots even at the end of the world. Zeno is disgusted by the factitiousness of his previous life as a scientist and now by the life of such travelers, who call themselves "environmental activists," yet are not willing to adopt a sustainable way of life. "The weather is mild, the mood euphoric" when a party is thrown on the ship, with barbecue and dancing to the music of "sunshine, sunshine reggae."^[33] Both Zeno's and Giannozzo's ends are tragic. The harmony that formally reigned between the modern hero and the weather has now been lost forever. Having to decide between humans and nature, Trojanow opts for misanthropy as the lesser evil in the name of the planet, and makes his *alter ego* declare: "We have to thrust man from his pedestal in order to save him."^[34] The writer turns in the end into a spokesman for holistic thinking.

4. Meteorological aesthetics in the anthropocene

To resume the previous argument, what common sense calls beautiful weather is usually left unquestioned, given its synonymy with fine weather and the strength of the cliché about what fine weather should be like, irrespective of the diversity of climates with their presumably different "ideal" weather conditions. Furthermore, fine weather only seldom becomes an object of reflection, given the priority of practical

interests in everyday life and the tendency of so-called fine weather not to be attended and to remain in the background as a mere medium of life and practical activity. Another objection to the common blue-sky thinking is determined by the general need for variation: constantly blue sky and sunny weather would inevitably result in boredom, but the same goes for any kind of weather. On the whole, this means that what is usually considered fine weather cannot be dismissed *de jure* from a positive aesthetic attitude but has only to be placed in a larger context.

As a matter of fact, the positive appreciation of the weather in any region of the globe is related to a short-term pattern (fine weather interrupts a series of less "fine" days) and, at the same time, is embedded in a more general spatial and temporal context. (What is considered fine weather depends on the local climate, the season, and the moment of the day.)

In other words, fine weather is not fine as such but in relation to its contextual framing, and it gains its appeal from contrast with normal conditions. How beauty can emerge from contrast is a well-known psychological law of perception; however, the issue of normality requires further discussion, which allows me to take up again the issue raised by Trojanow. For example, if fine weather repeatedly contradicts our expectations about "normal" weather according to the natural climatic cycle, moral considerations related to climate change eventually take precedence over both aesthetic reasons and short-term practical interests. To put it differently, it would be irresponsible to wish for no rain, fog, storm, or snow only because they impede one's activities.

Therefore, for any meteorological aesthetics to be developed one should, on one hand, endeavor to extend the common positive appreciation of fine weather to instances of "bad weather," *beyond the theory of the dynamical sublime*, with its focus on catastrophes. Aesthetic reflection can help us acknowledge that aesthetically appealing meteorological events are not confined to those weather conditions that imply comfort or security and enable us to carry out leisure activities outdoors. On the other hand, a purely aesthetic appreciation of the weather has to be restricted in our day by a moral perspective. The vivid colors of the pollution sunsets may make these appear sensational, but the knowledge of their source – the aerosols produced by human activity – tempers the admiration and inhibits the allegedly "disinterested" aesthetic attitude. As Trojanow's above-mentioned episode emphasized, one now has good reasons to raise the question of the proper aesthetic attitude towards atmospheric events.

And this issue splits the traditional unanimity about fine weather into environmentally committed people and naïve or egoistic consumers of weather.

Which aesthetic theory would then fit activist writers like Trojanow and the public concerned with environment? Obviously, this can hardly be the neo-Romantic *ökologische Ästhetik* or *Naturästhetik* that both Gernot Böhme and Martin Seel outlined in the 1980s and 1990s. In the new context of the post-carbon or Anthropocene age (Paul Crutzen), when humans turned from passive recipients of weather into weathermakers, "to have one's head in the clouds" does not necessarily mean any more to be exalted and out of touch

with the real world. On the contrary, it is to be aware of the present environmental dangers and to assume responsibility, including restricting one's need for stereotypical "beauty" and restraining oneself from shortsightedly consuming "beautiful weather" at the expense of sustainability.

Thus a meteorological aesthetics endorses Berleant's humanistic conviction about the general basic convergence between aesthetic and moral values, yet without confounding them: "Ultimately the morality of beauty and the beauty of morality cannot be kept separate. Each enhances and contributes to the other."^[35] As a matter of fact, what is at stake in the attempt to outline a meteorological aesthetics of our age is the proper configuration of a triad of values, in which the aesthetic and the moral values are connected and mediated by scientific knowledge. The attitude of an aesthetic of unreflective ingenuousness, supposedly legitimized by aesthetic disinterestedness and correlated with scientific ignorance, is not pardonable in the age of media and technology. New media grant open access to information, and the scope of the influence achieved by technology makes it unavoidable to inquire about the real causes of a meteorological event, including what is commonly regarded as fine weather. Normality makes its comeback as a value, although in other fields than in modernity, where it led to all sorts of social discrimination.

To continue, in spite of the basic difference between the aesthetic, moral, and theoretical attitudes, the aesthetic appreciation of weather depends on extra-aesthetic judgments regarding the normality of natural order. Anyway, the environmental sciences and environmental ethics do not necessarily have to inhibit positive aesthetic appreciation but may open new dimensions of environmental "beauty," as the general term for aesthetic value. For example, they are able to raise the awareness of climate change and at the same time to enhance aesthetic experience, by shifting the focus of aesthetic appreciation from dramatic weather shows to less conspicuous weather conditions.

To refer again to Trojanow's example, the awareness of how vulnerable the huge masses of glaciers have become because of the greenhouse effect intensifies the impression of their majestic beauty by contrasting it to their ephemerality and fragility. Humans may even begin to see the beauty of some landscapes only when they are confronted with the prospect that they may well disappear. In any case, such a change of perspective presupposes extending the reference system used in evaluating the weather and relating the meteorological dynamics no longer to individual well-being but to the function of the atmosphere in enabling and preserving the environment. One implication of this shift is the desubjectification of judgments of weather, opening, as well, the possibility of arguing for certain overall limits about the weather: *de tempestate disputandum est*.

This shift of perspective has already been suggested by some environmental ethicists. For example, Holmes Rolston III regards rarity, richness, and complexity as aspects of natural value, and interprets spontaneity, in relation to the diversity of species and landscapes, as the testimony to "exuberance in

nature” and an “inventive natural history.”[36] His statements can be extended to the field of atmospheric events as well. The proteanism of weather conditions expresses the spontaneity of nature, while the diversity of climate and the complexity of the atmospheric system are the achievement of an immemorial natural history that started long before the appearance of the human species. Thus, scientific reflection enables us to place the average aesthetic appreciation of the weather in a broader context in which the magnitude of the spatial scale (weather events as part of the complex system of the atmosphere) is doubled by the magnitude of the temporal scale (the atmosphere as result of an unimaginably long process).

In the light of minimal scientific literacy, particular weather conditions that tend to be flatly dismissed in everyday life as being “normal for the season” suddenly reveal their hidden basis: the normality (of both fine and inclement weather) begins to rise to the surface, like the base of an iceberg. To set forth Rolston’s argument, we may acknowledge that the hypercomplex system called Earth is such a wonder, instead of chasing after other more eye-catching yet ultimately far less significant wonders. We may rediscover humility and learn to think on other scales, “like a mountain” for Aldo Leopold or “like a planet” for his followers Paul Hirsch and Bryan Norton.[37] This reflection allows the aesthetic subject to exchange spectatorship for participation in a cosmic drama, and to somehow expand one’s individual identity by extending the capacity to feel awe for what is “natural” and taken for granted.

My plea here for a reflective aesthetic attitude toward weather conditions is meant to combat both the poor blue-sky thinking that underlies widespread consumption of tourist destinations at long distances, and the avidity for the “sublimity” of catastrophes that are consumed in disaster tourism and permanently abetted by turning the weather into a spectacle by the new media, including weather photography and weather reports converted into weather shows. The alternative would be a sort of responsibility in forming and satisfying aesthetic interests, for example by seeking less intensive experiences and becoming sensitive to the poetics of the everyday weather, both fine and bad. The aesthetic consumption of the weather could be replaced by an aesthetic enjoyment that would learn from literature and art that inclement weather has an inexhaustible reservoir of aesthetical values called atmospheres or moodscapes, and from science that the most banal weather conditions deserve our entire perceptual attention as a starting point for any aesthetic experience.

In any case, a meteorological aesthetics is inseparable from the cosmopolitan attitude John Urry urged. Unlike other forms of cosmopolitanism, aesthetic cosmopolitanism is a natural and universal attitude, and the Cloud Appreciation Society, which calls for a new “Internationale” by proclaiming more or less ironically, “Cloud Lovers, Unite!,” is a good example of how the aesthetic appreciation of nature is not irrevocably condemned to be stranded in individualistic enjoyment but, on the contrary, may also inspire the founding of new aesthetic communities that may be otherwise quite heterogeneous. This social and holistic thinking contrasts with the individualistic

notion of aesthetic behavior conceived as private contemplation that we can still find in the neo-Romantic aesthetics of nature.

Nevertheless, it may be argued that this does not necessarily imply the complete rejection of traditional aesthetics of contemplation but only its transformation. If the climate virtue-moralists require a "new goodness," aestheticians can remind them that, according to Kant, the "*immediate interest* in the beauty of *nature*" is "always the mark of a good soul" and that the habitual interest and intentional *contemplation of nature* "indicate a frame of mind favorable to the moral feeling."^[38] At the same time, the tradition of the aesthetic contemplation of nature has to be adapted to our age in which the perception of the weather is commonly mediated by science and new media.

Finally, a meteorological aesthetics has to tackle several other issues that can only be briefly listed here, such as: How can the accuracy of prediction and the complexity of visualization influence the weather perception? How could we balance the visual spectacularization of the weather in weather shows and its poor verbal counterpart in the mass culture? Can scientific descriptions compensate for the contemporary writers' lack of interest in weather descriptions? Given its basis in perception, the aesthetic attitude is perhaps the most direct way of noticing the effects of climate change. How, then, could an aesthetic theory of the sky support the necessity of a corresponding ethics that would enhance the awareness of global interdependence? Finally, if we agree on the necessity to adopt new cultural models, to develop new institutions, and to perform a "shift in the core metaphor"^[39] by overcoming the modern metaphor of productivity and creativity, how could aesthetics contribute to this social and cultural change?

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Endnotes

^[1] Holmes Rolston, III, "Celestial Aesthetics: Over Our Heads and/or in Our Heads," *Theology and Science*, 9, 3 (2011), 273-285, 281.

^[2] Quoted in F. C. Delius, *Der Held und sein Wetter. Ein Kunstmittel und sein ideologischer Gebrauch im Roman des*

bürgerlichen Realismus (München: Hanser, 1971), p. 103.

[3] "Wetter ist immer ungerecht," interview with F. C. Delius, *Die Zeit*, 16.8.2007.
http://www.fcdelius.de/gespraech/zeit_wetter.html
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[4] F. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik I*. Werke Bd. 13 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), p. 61.

[5] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, § 28.

[6] Arnold Berleant, "Celestial Aesthetics," in *Sensibility and Sense. The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010), pp. 137-153.

[7] Rolston, *op. cit.*

[8] David Macauley, "Head in the Clouds: On the Beauty of the Aerial World," *Environment, Space, Place*, 2, 1 (Spring 2010), 147-184.

[9] See the section on "aerographies" in *Society and Space: Environment and Planning D* (2011, Vol. 29, No. 3 June), 435-550. The guest editors of the special topic of the issue, Mark Jackson and Maria Fannin, unveil the crust, the solid or the Earth as the implicit elemental assumption of geography and welcome the recent revival of materialism in philosophy by focusing on aerial phenomena, in the hope that these may heuristically lead to extended ontologies and ecological theories ("Letting geography fall where it may – aerographies address the elemental," *op. cit.*, pp. 435-444). The essays they selected deal with "atmospheric attunements" (Kathleen Stewart), the "'aerography' of ethereal space" (Kenneth R. Olwig), the experience of fog (Craig Martin), the airborne contagion (Peta Mitchell), but also with art projects related to celestial events (Yuriko Saito), etc.

[10] Rolston, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

[11] Aristotle, *Poetics*, Chap. 4, 1448 b.

[12] Martin Seel, *Eine Ästhetik der Natur* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991). The atmosphere plays a central role also in Hermann Schmitz' phenomenology and in Gernot Böhme's aesthetic theory.

[13] Cf. Macauley, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

[14] Cloud Appreciation Society.
<http://cloudappreciationsociety.org> [9.4.2014]

[15] E. M. Cioran, *Cahiers (1957–1972)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 942; David Le Breton, *Eloge de la marche* (Paris: Métailié, 2000), pp. 142-144; Georges Perec, *Espaces* (Paris: Galilée, 1985).

[16] E. M. Cioran, *Cahiers. 1957–1972* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 970. [my transl., M.D.]

[17] Craig Martin, "Fog-bound: aerial space and the elemental entanglements of body-with-world," *op. cit.*, p. 454.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* (London: Athlon Press, 1999).

[20] Macauley, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

[21] Saint Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990).

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 149.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

[24] Delius in interview, *op. cit.*

[25] Cf. *ibid.*

[26] Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, vol. 1 (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961), p. 3.

[27] Delius, *Der Held und sein Wetter*, p. 77.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 82.

[29] Iris Radisch, „Die Literatur und ihr Wetter. Ein anderer Klima-Wandel“. *Die Zeit*, 15.11.2006, <http://www.zeit.de/2006/47/L-Glosse47> [14.4.2014]

[30] Jerome D. Salinger, *Nine Stories* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), pp. 3-18.

[31] John Urry, *Climate Change and Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), p. 36.

[32] Ilija Trojanow, *EisTau* (München: Hanser, 2011).

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 157.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 167.

[35] Arnold Berleant, „The Aesthetics of Politics,” *op. cit.*, pp. 213-223, p. 222.

[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

[37] Paul D. Hirsch, Bryan G. Norton, „Thinking Like a Planet,” in *Ethical adaptation to climate change. Human virtues of the future*, ed. by Allen Thompson and Jeremy Bendik-Keymer (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012), pp. 317-334.

[38] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Judgement* (New York: Hafner Press, 1951), § 42, p. 141.

[39] Aldo Leopold, quoted in Hirsch and Norton, *op. cit.*, p. 321.
