

## *Media Climates: An Introduction*

ON THE EVENING OF SEPTEMBER 11, 1954, Hurricane Edna, a category two storm that had formed nine days earlier near the Bahamas and dropped the most rain on New York City in almost half a century, made landfall on the eastern tip of Massachusetts. From there it brought heavy flooding to Maine, destroying crops and leaving at least eight dead. At his saltwater farm south of Blue Hill, writer E. B. White had passed the day rounding up livestock, securing windows, storing extra water, and tracking the storm's arrival on the radio. Less than two weeks earlier, New England had been devastated by a more powerful hurricane, Carol, which first came ashore near Long Island, creating a storm surge that covered the Montauk Highway and flooded LaGuardia Airport. White's account of the latter storm, "The Eye of Edna," suggests both the anxiety and the media spectacle that the succession of storms created (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> Anticipating the unsettling tension in today's hurricane coverage between the need for fair warning about imminent danger and the advertising-driven search for sensational images of disaster, White wryly ridicules the hosts and meteorologists who create "those confused moments, emotionally, when the listener could not be quite sure what position radio was taking—for hurricanes or *against* them."<sup>2</sup> Bombarded by descriptions of the storm's raging wind and rain throughout an otherwise uneventful day, White is left, when the storm finally rushes through his farm late in the night—having passed the media hubs to the south hours earlier—with the sounds of regular programming, as if the hurricane no longer existed. "Radio loses interest in Nature," White concludes, "just as soon as Nature passes in front of the window" and departs.<sup>3</sup>

More than just a commentary on the nature of the news cycle, with its superficial and fleeting interest in weather and states of emergency, White's essay also captures, more broadly, the strange nature of weather's mediation, always out of sync and out of time, an approximation of reality rendered in abstractions. Will it be partly cloudy or mostly sunny? What chance



FIGURE 1. “America: Hurricane ‘Edna’ Sweeps the Coast” (Gaumont British, 1954).

of rain, sleet, or snow? Just when, precisely, will that cold front come through? Where will the hurricane land? Media provide approximate answers and, as Roland Barthes described a few months later, the illusion of control. Writing about press photographs of flooding along the Seine, Barthes cautioned readers about the role images play in distancing us from the reality of nature’s unruly forces, which might be framed by the camera but could never be truly contained by technology, and about how weather’s effects—flooding and its damage—so quickly become disconnected from their causes: the Seine, the rain, and, we might now add, the changing climate.<sup>4</sup>

Weather so often—and often so misleadingly—mediates our knowledge of climate. As White’s and Barthes’s respective accounts underscore, our experience of weather is similarly—and again often misleadingly—mediated. White and Barthes were writing from the heart of a not-yet-named moment of change now known variously as the “Great Acceleration” or one of the many versions of the so-called “Anthropocene,” and similar accounts might be found around the globe in 1954—in Iran, where flash flooding in August killed scores in Tehran and displaced thousands in the countryside; in Japan, where Typhoon Marie struck on September 26, sinking a ferry carrying more than 1,000 passengers; and in China, where flooding on the Yangtze killed more than 100,000 and uprooted rural populations, as well as those in cities like Wuhan, both despite and in some ways as a result of technological attempts to control the river. These catastrophic weather

events have become increasingly common, as Hurricane Katrina and the racial and economic injustices it revealed in its wake have shown.<sup>5</sup> But the forms of mediation White and Barthes described lucidly evoke a rich conceptual nexus that emerges when we join weather, climate, and media, particularly when we understand weather and media in the capacious sense respectively stressed by thinkers like Christina Sharpe and John Durham Peters.<sup>6</sup>

This issue marks what we see as a pivotal moment in the growing body of scholarship that has made that nexus—and media’s connections to weather, environment, ecology, and climate—its focus. Such connections have been the stuff of film and media theory for more than a century, driven in part by recognition of the moving image’s power to stage encounters with natural and built worlds made strange by mediation. Twenty-first-century scholarly investments in environmental, or eco-, criticism, have begun to recover the insights of that earlier tradition while also bringing an environmentalist impulse to film and media criticism in ways resonant across the humanities. This work has roots in the late 1990s, when a text-focused environmental media criticism emerged, importantly prompted in part by environmental historians and historians of science interested in the image’s power to shape environmental knowledge.<sup>7</sup> Over the past decade, inspired to some degree by the discourse of the so-called “Anthropocene” and enriched by the work of scholars in adjacent fields and the interconnected environmental humanities, media scholars have turned this tendency into a burgeoning subfield, refining text-based methods while also expanding the field’s methodological remit to include materials and infrastructure, as well as the insights of environmental theory, philosophy, and ethics.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond the now commonplace (if nonetheless important and true) premise that cinema and media texts have the power both to create and to undermine environmental consciousness, whether in the form of activist documentaries, corporate propaganda and PR, fictional allegories, or latent forms of normalizing representation, this scholarship has generated three particularly significant conceptual strands that this issue both continues to develop and from which it seeks new points of departure. First, cinematic media, as systems of material and virtual world creation, with roots in the technologies and logics of the Industrial Revolution and its dependence upon world-altering regimes of colonial extraction, don’t simply *represent* but in fact themselves *embody* the anthropocentric ambitions of Western modernity and its resource-hungry forms of life.<sup>9</sup> Second, those same systems equally hold the potential for modes of perception and recording that decenter human vision and may be used to build and model alternative and even resistant social formations.<sup>10</sup> Finally, whether anthropocentric or radically estranging, moving-image media—powered and structured by

dispersed networks of cables and connectors, transmission towers and switching stations, server farms, satellites, and extraction sites—are directly implicated in the warming of the world and its strained and estranged ecologies.<sup>11</sup>

With these insights firmly established, where should this no-longer-new field go next? In answering this question, we must in part consider what film and media scholars have to offer the environmental humanities more generally. The media-environment dialectic—in which media create and are in turn always created by built and natural environments—offers one heuristic through which to consider media-environment-climate formations in a range of geographic and historical contexts. While media scholars have provided particularly rich accounts of this dialectic as it operates from environments of production through to display and reception, it is by no means specific to media (studies).<sup>12</sup> After all, one might well argue that the work of all artists—not to mention writers, who work no less according to the affordances and limitations of their material surroundings—operates according to a similar to-and-fro of world cocreation.

As several of the essays in the issue also demonstrate, climate change is, in many important respects, a visual problem to which media scholars, like colleagues in the increasingly interconnected fields of art history and visual culture, are well suited to respond.<sup>13</sup> Where once it was driven, in the most clichéd (and still persistent) forms, by images of melting ice caps and endangered polar bears, climate change's visual epistemology now also includes work such as the data visualizations that track, forecast, and make visible, and therefore knowable, slow changes over long time scales. Political struggles over climate action similarly continue to be waged to significant degrees through media images, as they have been for decades.<sup>14</sup>

This is not to assume, as some have cautioned against, that making things visible leads in any straightforward way to climate or social justice.<sup>15</sup> Visibility and invisibility, as media scholars know well, always involve complex political, social, and material negotiations. One of the powerful themes that has emerged in recent scholarship and that animates many of this issue's essays is the epistemological utility of doubt, skepticism, and uncertainty about the nature of nature and its apprehension through visual media. As Jennifer Fay puts it most succinctly here, "Do I know the Anthropocene when I see it?" How, that is, do we understand the utility of vision when what looks like nature is culture, or what looks like evidence of catastrophe is as close to undisturbed nature as one may still expect to find? The destabilization of ontological categories that this kind of uncertainty indexes may, our essays suggest, be one of the defining outcomes of climate change and Anthropocene discourse, particularly as its universalizing assumptions have been widely challenged. Rather than doubting the utility

of visual epistemology or analysis, however, our essays tell us that we must take this ontological destabilization as an opportunity, whether to seek alternatives to the Eurocentric lineages that have largely defined Anthropocene theories, to recognize that uncertainty is in fact a powerful spark for thinking and feeling (and not just the domain of climate change skeptics and “merchants of doubt”), or to trace the histories of techniques that have been used to mitigate doubt and uncertainty themselves.<sup>16</sup>

Every photographic and filmic image is a complex condensation of forms of preservation and destructive expenditure and may, to adapt a term from David E. James, allegorize its own actual and ideal ecological and environmental impacts and positions.<sup>17</sup> The specific archival—or, as Paula Amad eloquently formulates, “counter-archival”—dimensions of photographic and filmic media, particularly in its relation to questions of environment and the material world, offer another important heuristic for environmental humanities work.<sup>18</sup> Cinematic media in its archival afterlives presents a “database,” as Jennifer Fay observes, of anthropological, zoological, and climatological phenomena.<sup>19</sup> This derives in no small part from what Siegfried Kracauer conceptualized as the aesthetic specificities and historiographic potentials of lens-based photographic media, which in his idiom produce “art with a difference,” or what we might, in a nod to Theodor W. Adorno and Antoine de Baecque, refer to as “cinematographic forms of [natural] history.”<sup>20</sup> With photography and film, according to Kracauer, the art form’s raw materials—the stuff of the world and the traces of the real—are not wholly sublimated by the act of creation. They remain present—even stubbornly so—in the final work. The anthropologically indifferent lens and capacious substrate (be it a photographic plate, emulsion-covered celluloid film stock, or the charge-coupled device of digital imaging technologies) are capable of recording both what a camera operator intends and whatever contingent phenomena happen to be within the field of vision, such as in Eadweard J. Muybridge’s Plate 365 from *Animal Locomotion*, vol. 5 (1887), titled “Headspring. Pigeon Interfering” (fig. 2). In this respect, the *dispositif* has an ontologically flattening and even transvaluative potential. The French film critic Louis Delluc succinctly formulated this attribute of photographic media in 1921, with respect to American westerns: to the inhuman eye of the camera, the human actor “is no more than a detail, a fragment of the material that is the world.”<sup>21</sup> Camera vision can introduce attentive observers to a world as seen otherwise than through the anthropocentrism of habituated perception.

One of the most enduring stories from the history of cinema is the extent to which the audiences of the earliest motion pictures were fascinated by the “wind in the leaves” in the background of Louis Lumière’s 1895 demonstration film *Le Repas de bébé* (Baby’s meal). The scene of

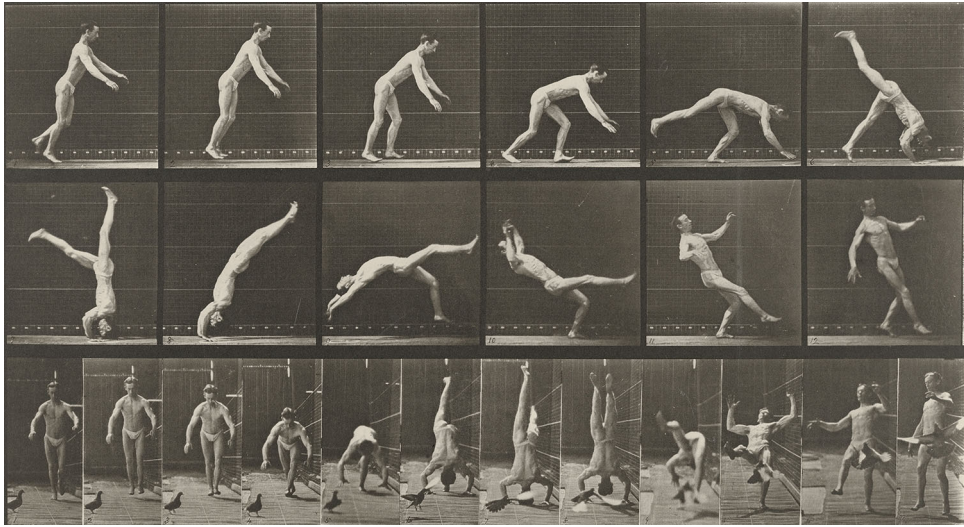


FIGURE 2. Eadweard J. Muybridge, “Headspring. Pigeon Interfering.” Plate 365 from *Animal Locomotion*, vol. 5: Men (pelvis cloth) (Philadelphia, 1887). Collotype, 8 x 14 7/16” (20.4 x 36.7 cm). Gift of the Philadelphia Commercial Museum. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.

parents feeding a baby in their garden was momentarily “upstaged” by the seemingly minor details in the background that are beyond the control of the filmmakers: the presence of an invisible breeze indexed by rustling leaves.<sup>22</sup> Such shifts in perception and attention to the presence of nonhuman forces and atmospheres showcase the capacity of lens-based media, in their difference from human vision, to temporarily decenter human dramas, placing them within larger contexts and ecologies. The medium’s hospitality to contingency and nonhuman forces plays a significant role in the production, reception, and aesthetics of photography and film. It also provides generative models for practices of thinking that are attuned to human and nonhuman forces in their relative autonomy and deep entanglements, their simultaneity and heterotemporality. The same frame may contain the most meticulously rehearsed choreography and divergent and ungovernable forces in a copresence without synthesis: art with a *différance*.

In his 1977 film *Le Fond de l’air est rouge* Chris Marker observed, “You never know what you might be filming”: what is insignificant or background in one context may become of central concern and foregrounded in another. As archival media, photography and cinema capture data far in excess of what their creators intended. In her essay for this issue, Jennifer

Peterson engagingly develops a parallel line of thinking through her considerations of the “Anthropocene viewing condition,” wherein historic footage reads differently, and often in surprising manners, in a present overdetermined by increasingly urgent forms of endangerment. The Anthropocene viewing condition sensitizes spectators to a destabilization of figure and ground in old films, as their footage serves as testaments and “cultural markers” of particular historical understandings of the nonhuman world, as well as “core samples” rich with unexpected and untimely forms of data, not unlike the bird and insect specimens in natural history museums that climate scientists are now using to measure and track pollution levels and the effects of global warming.<sup>23</sup>

Peterson’s intervention reverberates with a deepening historical materialist approach to ecological matters in media studies that we might christen an “Anthropocene reading condition,” attuned to the strong currents of systems thinking and attentive to the relations of found and created environments that run through the history of film theory like a subterranean river. The first generations of film critics and theorists of the 1910s–30s, who tasked themselves with conceptualizing new and strange media milieux (at the site of production, as images, and at the sites of reception), encountered a natural world newly, and sometimes *only*, available through technological mediation. Moving-image media were thought alongside and often through an *activated nature*—transformed by the upheavals of massive engineering projects creating the transportation and information infrastructures of modernization, rapid urbanization, and industrialization; forms of atmospheric war involving gas and nerve agents; and geoclimatological disasters such as the Great Kantō Earthquake in Japan, the eruption of Mount Etna in Sicily in 1923, and the devastating Yangtze-Huai River floods in 1931. The history of film theory as media theory offers an archive of approaches to thinking environment and climate outside of the purities of a nature-culture divide.<sup>24</sup>

Photographic and filmic images, in their production, help archive contingent and fleeting phenomena, as well as the attempted management of such contingencies, which has been, *via negativa*, the engine of the medium’s own historical development as art and industry requiring greater forms of calculation and control. The worldmaking enterprises of narrative cinema, as Brian Jacobson and others have argued, rely on an anthropocentric control of environments and the creation of particular media climates at the sites of production and reception.<sup>25</sup> Katerina Korola, in her contribution to this issue, extends the materialist dimension of this history in her careful attention to the forms of environmental control practiced by the modernist photographer Albert Renger-Patzsch in the darkroom and printing laboratory, where he meticulously developed the absent image of “fresh

air” for his architectural photographs taken in the Ruhr Valley, infamous for its industrial pollution. Producing “pure” images required not just good fortune with the profilmic scene, but a hygienic practice of environmental and climatic control in the places where images get made, suggesting a media genealogy of resource-intensive environmental control connecting the photographic darkroom, film studio, and “cleanrooms” of Silicon Valley and Taiwan, wherein image production is not just about documentation but about the highly controlled manufacture of environments and climates.<sup>26</sup>

Korola’s arguments about the porousness of sites of image production—Renger-Patzsch may have aspired to use photography like a sort of bell jar to preserve a modernist purity, but this is primarily symptomatic of an aspiration rather than actuality—extend well into Debashree Mukherjee’s consideration of the relationship between studio and location shooting and the scene of film production in and around Bombay (present-day Mumbai) in the 1930s, showing the heuristic value of bringing microhistories and microclimates into conversation. She examines the complex empirical and ideological registers, at once semiotic and substantial, of landscape and climate—which are never innocent terms to be taken as givens—particularly within the context of colonial imposition and Indigenous attempts at reclamation. Cautious about the universalizing nature of Anthropocene discourse, which too readily reproduces Eurocentric and imperialist logics, Mukherjee advocates a “patchy” approach (a fitting meteorological metaphor) carefully attuned to local climates.

All weather may ultimately be a result of hyperlocal conditions influenced by much larger systems. The challenge of holding such separate realities in mind without collapsing them informs Yuriko Furuhashi’s examination of Anthropocene discourse’s revival of myth as a way of mediating the paradoxical temporal registers of human and geological histories. As an alternative to the Eurocentric mythic allusions to Gaia and other figures that have been proposed as ways of grappling with the inhuman scale of a global crisis—one of the key tasks of myth is to provide explanations for the unexplained—she explores the myth of the “weather maiden” circulating in the Asian Pacific region as reanimated by Shinkai Makoto’s feature *Weathering with You* (Japan, 2019).<sup>27</sup> This figure provides an opportunity to think about the mediation of temporal and scalar registers, as well as the necessity of maintaining distinctions often effaced by universalist discourses. Shinkai’s animated film revises the premodern village shaman with a twenty-first-century twist by having her monetize her ability to control the weather by selling patches of sunshine through a smartphone app, which Furuhashi reads as allegorizing planetary geoengineering efforts and the fantasies of market-driven technological fixes. The actuality of myth—and a variant of the myth of weather maidens—is poignantly examined in Pom





FIGURE 3. Piano planting lemongrass to try to ward off a coming storm and preserve location shooting. *Lemongrass Girl*. Directed by Pom Bunsermvicha (Thailand, 2021). Courtesy of Pom Bunsermvicha and Square Eyes Film.

Bunsermvicha's short film *Lemongrass Girl* (Thailand, 2021), a fitting companion piece to Shinkai's film and Furuhata's analysis, and an innovative model of critical and ecological filmmaking (fig. 3).<sup>28</sup> Shot on set during the production of Anocha Suwichakornpong's feature *Come Here* (Thailand, 2021) and intermixing documentary and fiction, Bunsermvicha's short follows Piano, a production manager (actually working on *Come Here*), who is tasked with fulfilling the role of "lemongrass girl" on a film shoot when bad weather threatens the production. Based in the local superstition that having a female virgin plant lemongrass will hold off stormy weather, the enduring presence of "weather virgins" at the scene of production in Thailand, and the wished-for control of the environment—gender, sex, work, and weather—they are called upon to embody, requires approaches to media climates sensitive to the complex interfaces of human and nonhuman forces, as well as to micropolitical dynamics.

The cinema in its many architectural and spatial forms—from air-conditioned picture palace to open-air video parlor—instantiates media milieux, in the sense captured by Antonio Somaini in his reading of Walter Benjamin's theory of medium as the place "in which sensory perception 'occurs and is organized,'" as well as in Georges Canguilhem's sense of

milieu as a literal *mi-lieu*: a middle or mediating place—an interface—between organism and environment.<sup>29</sup> It is not just onscreen but within an entire built space that cinema generates atmospheres and climates. Weihong Bao’s account of the *yiyifeng*—women who, through a system of wireless in-ear receivers, served as live interpreters for cinemagoers watching foreign-language films in postwar China—conceptualizes climate at the site of reception, examining the “cloudy” remediation of human interiority with diverse forms of exteriority that produce highly charged affective and informational environments. As with Jennifer Fay’s questioning of any self-evident nature of the Anthropocene, Bao calls upon us to rethink what climates entail, contemplating the possibility that there is no (one) climate change, for climate is never one thing.

What climate change teaches us is not simply the crisis of climate as an object of concern. Rather, it is a jolt of recognition, a crisis of knowledge and perception. As Zack Horton puts it sharply, “The shock of the Anthropocene is less the shock of geological time or planetary space than it is the shock of Western thought confronting its own limits. The surprise is that the Anthropocene is a surprise.”<sup>30</sup> If climate change urges us to confront human-centered interest, it necessarily opens up new models of perceiving, thinking, and doing. This simultaneous epistemic and ethical challenge requires a fundamental dishabituation to and destabilization of existing categories and measures of knowledge, thus placing doubt and uncertainty at the center of our inquiry.

The current “climate of doubt”—a mass-mediated horizon of expression and experience in denying the reality of climate change, election results, the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine efficacy, and the rise of anti-Asian violence, to name a few contested phenomena—has made doubt an increasingly dubious and unsavory term, deprived of its cognitive capacity and critical potential. Weaponized for the political war and mongered by “merchants of doubt”—the network of pseudoscientific researchers, policy makers and lobbyists, corporations, and social media—doubt has turned into an object of mass consumption and is followed like a blind faith.<sup>31</sup> Doubt, in this context, is a misnomer for negative belief, a collective denial marked by tenacity, authority, and frenzy, an impoverishment of thinking that hinders us from the perpetual quest for knowledge.

This paradoxical character of doubt as belief revolves around the role of uncertainty in modern science. Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway recognize how doubt both drives science forward—in the form of curiosity and healthy skepticism—and makes it vulnerable to misinterpretation. This is because, contrary to our conception of science as “cold, hard, definite facts,” uncertainty marks any *live* science as a “process of discovery.”<sup>32</sup> The “Enlightenment ideal of knowledge as perfect certainty,” as Paul Edwards reminds us,

prevents us from understanding climate science, or, indeed, studies of any global phenomenon, as “shimmering data, shimmering knowledge.”<sup>33</sup> Built on the mutual constitution of model and data, climate science is marked by a complex process of constant modification and coordination that gives us glimpses of possible futures and possible pasts. Climate science, in other words, is paradigmatic of modern science, which defies the causal logic of knowledge. Ironically, the discourse of the Anthropocene has revived causal logic, putting the human at the impossible center as both the cause and fix of our planetary crisis, thereby missing the greater opportunity for us to better understand our entanglement with the world and with each other to which our climate crisis alerts us.

If environmental humanities in the past have been striving to provide more perceptual evidence and data to reaffirm a reductive understanding of scientific findings as objective truth, we now need to reflect on the critical capacity of humanities fields well equipped to address these issues of uncertainty. Informed by poststructuralist and postcolonial thinking, feminism, gender and queer studies, and critical race theory, humanists have long questioned the stable notion of the human subject and its “radical heterogeneity,” which ironically risks being homogenized under the notion of the Anthropocene. In other words, we need to move beyond the evidentiary and causality model of knowledge and account for contingency as the mode of our knowledge and existence. We can start by problematizing climate as mere “matter” and considering the social, affective, and physical climate together, if we hope to make our changing atmosphere sustainable. Our current jarring experience of climate change under the pandemic has humbled us to appreciate the vitality and fragility of air as a life-sustaining and threatening environment, as well as a medium of transmission and communication.

Yet it is the pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce who helps us understand that doubt and belief are not opposites but different states of mind that feed on each other, with implications for our daily practice. While doubt creates an irritation that sets thought in motion, belief arrives at the end to appease and cease the thought.<sup>34</sup> The application of belief in action involves further doubt and further thought, making belief “the demi-cadence which closes a musical phrase in the symphony of our intellectual life.”<sup>35</sup> The essence of belief, Peirce argues, is the establishment of *habit*, rules for action that distinguish beliefs and determine the meaning of thinking. Importantly, habits are tied to perception, both in terms of processing stimuli and making sense of the results, which determines *when* and *how* habits cause action.

Peirce sets the pragmatist agenda for thinking as a movement that links doubt and belief in a constantly renewing process that produces meaning, measured only by “the possible difference of practice.”<sup>36</sup> Doubt and belief

are thus not differentiated as affirmation or negation but rather mark temporary stages in the movement of thought. Crucially, doubt and belief are connected to the outside world in terms of perception and action. For Peirce, this outside connection is what distinguishes the scientific method from the other three ways to settle an opinion or fix a belief—methods of tenacity (holding onto a belief blindly, like an ostrich sticking its head in the sand), authority (institutionalized belief), and the *a priori* (the internal circuit of reason). This outside world is radically nonhuman. “To satisfy our doubts, therefore, it is necessary,” Peirce writes, “that a method should be found by which our beliefs may be determined by nothing human, but by some external—permanency—by something upon which our thinking has no effect.”<sup>37</sup>

But how do we access these elements of the nonhuman without collapsing our differences in scale and milieu?<sup>38</sup> If thought is the movement of doubt and belief but measures the distance between them, the short-circuiting of doubt and belief forecloses thinking itself as the opening of knowledge. This is why pairing media and climate allows us to understand how perception itself requires the mediums of both air—even when diligently erased in the darkroom for New Objectivity (Korola)—and the camera lens, and how cinematic perception creates a space for thinking that activates (un)seeing, (un)perceiving, and (un)doing as generative forces of knowledge (Fay). Seen through the media/climate in wartime/postwar China, doubt is no longer a stage but becomes thinking itself, not closing the circuit of thinking but precisely opening it up to a human-technical environment that processes our understanding as a becoming, like the mutating cloud (Bao).

In using the word “climate” in this issue’s title (rather than, say, “environment” or “ecology”), we hope to highlight the importance of not too readily associating such terms with climate *change*, environment *alism*, or simply the weather outside (*the* environment). However inspiring or evocative climate change may be, we need to keep open dialogues between those pressing topics of environmentalist discourse and other aspects of media studies that aren’t so obviously about climate (change) but may concern other aspects of the media climate that have significant bearing on climate change issues—for instance, the social, political, and affective climates that media represent and create.

A media study of climate may work best, we want to suggest, when it attends to some combination of the many things involved in the configuration or *dispositif* we call “media”: images and texts; infrastructures and technologies; social experiences; psychology and affect; politics, policy, and ideology; and the ways media literally create climates (in the studio, in the theater) and both rely upon environments (on location and in the

irrepressible vestige of the real always present in the image) and destroy them. Rare is the single scholar or essay that can do all of this at once, but to think “media climates” may ultimately be an attempt to hold these interlaced routes together, there in the unruly media climate that is the mind.

## Notes

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- This issue began as a conference organized by James Leo Cahill and Brian Jacobson at the University of Toronto, with generous funding from the Jackman Humanities Institute, on February 13–14, 2020. Still largely ignorant of the COVID-19 pandemic that soon dramatically altered the climate of scholarship, we gathered with the ambition of finding both common and unforeseen future ground for media and environment scholarship. We would like to thank Alison Keith and Kimberley Yates at the Jackman Humanities Institute, as well as the colleagues and scholars who attended and generously gave their time and intelligence to this endeavor, especially Kajri Jain, Selmin Kara, Sherry Lee, and Elizabeth Wijaya, and our students, among whom we particularly appreciate the work of Daniel Laurin, Meghan McDonald, and Matthew Thompson, without whom our environment would have been significantly less productive and harmonious.
1. E. B. White, “The Eye of Edna,” in *Essays of E. B. White* (New York, 1977).
  2. *Ibid.*, 27.
  3. *Ibid.*, 31.
  4. Roland Barthes, “Paris n’a pas été inondé,” in *Mythologies* (Paris, 1957), 57–60.
  5. On the 1954 Yangtze floods, see Chris Courtney, “At War with Water: The Maoist State and the 1954 Yangzi Floods,” *Modern Asian Studies* 52, no. 6 (2018): 1807–36.
  6. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC, 2016); John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago, 2015).
  7. See, for instance, Gregg Mitman, *Reel Nature: America’s Romance with Wildlife on Film* (Cambridge, MA, 1999); and David Ingram, *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema* (Exeter, 2000). Later examples include: Patrick Brereton, *Hollywood Utopia: Ecology in Contemporary American Cinema* (Bristol, 2005); Sean Cubitt, *Eco Media* (Amsterdam, 2005); Finis Dunaway, *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform* (Chicago, 2005); and Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann, eds., *Ecology and Popular Film: Cinema on the Edge* (Albany, 2009).
  8. Key texts include: Nadia Bozak, *The Cinematic Footprint: Lights, Camera, Natural Resources* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2012); Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller, *Greening the Media* (New York, 2012); Adrian J. Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature* (Waterloo, ON, 2013); Guinevere Narraway and Anat Pick, eds., *Screening Nature: Cinema Beyond the Human* (New York, 2013); Kristi McKim, *Cinema as Weather: Stylistic Screens and Atmospheric Change* (New York, 2013); Gregg Mitman and Kelley Wilder, eds., *Documenting the World: Film, Photography, and the Scientific Record* (Chicago, 2016); Nicole Starosielski and Janet Walker, eds., *Sustainable Media: Critical Approaches to Media and Environment* (London, 2016); Sean Cubitt, *Finite Media: Environmental Implications of Digital*

- Technologies* (Durham, NC, 2017); Jennifer Fay, *Inhospitable World: Cinema in the Time of the Anthropocene* (New York, 2018); and Hunter Vaughan, *Hollywood's Dirtiest Secret: The Hidden Environmental Costs of the Movies* (New York, 2019). See also the themed sections: "IN FOCUS: Film and Media Studies in the Anthropocene," eds. Jennifer Peterson and Graig Uhlin, *JCMS: Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 58, no. 2 (Winter 2019); and "Cinema's Natural Aesthetics: Environments and Perspectives in Contemporary Film Theory," eds. Cassandra Guan and Adam O'Brien, *Screen* 61, no. 2 (Summer 2020).
9. Brian R. Jacobson, *Studios Before the System: Architecture, Technology, and the Emergence of Cinematic Space* (New York, 2015); Jennifer Fay, "Buster Keaton's Climate Change," *Modernism/Modernity* 21, no. 1 (January 2014): 25–49.
  10. James Leo Cahill, *Zoological Surrealism: The Nonhuman Cinema of Jean Painlevé* (Minneapolis, 2019).
  11. Bozak, *The Cinematic Footprint*; Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski, eds., *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures* (Urbana-Champaign, 2015); Starosielski and Walker, *Sustainable Media*; Vaughan, *Hollywood's Dirtiest Secret*; Laura U. Marks, "Calculating and Mitigating Our Streaming Carbon Footprint," *Media + Environment* 2, no. 1 (2020), <https://mediaenviron.org/article/17242>.
  12. Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, MA, 2002); Weihong Bao, *Fiery Cinema: The Emergence of an Affective Medium in China, 1915–1945* (Minneapolis, 2015); Jacobson, *Studios Before the System*; Brian R. Jacobson, ed., *In the Studio: Visual Creation and Its Material Environments* (Oakland, 2020); Debashree Mukherjee, *Bombay Hustle: Making Movies in a Colonial City* (New York, 2020).
  13. See James Nisbet, *Ecologies, Environments, and Energy Systems in Art of the 1960s and 1970s* (Cambridge, MA, 2014); Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin, eds., *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* (London, 2015); T. J. Demos, *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology* (Berlin, 2016); and T. J. Demos, *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today* (Berlin, 2017).
  14. See, for instance, Finis Dunaway, *Seeing Green: The Use and Abuse of American Environmental Images* (Chicago, 2015); and Brian R. Jacobson, "The Shadow of Progress and the Cultural Markers of the Anthropocene," *Environmental History* 24, no. 1 (2019): 158–72.
  15. See, for instance, Jennifer Wenzel, *The Disposition of Nature: Environmental Crisis and World Literature* (New York, 2020), 14–15.
  16. Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (London, 2010). As Stacy Alaimo puts it, "Dwelling in the dissolve, where fundamental boundaries have begun to come undone, unraveled by unknown futures, can be a form of ethical engagement that emanates from both feminist and environmentalist practices"; Stacy Alaimo, *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (Minneapolis, 2016), 2. For Andrew Patrizio, "art and its attendant histories and analysis change when things become less secure and permanent. This is art history for the Anthropocene"; Andrew Patrizio, *The Ecological Eye: Assembling an Ecocritical Art History* (Manchester, 2019), 6. On the virtues of ambiguity and ambivalence, see also Nicole Seymour, *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age* (Minneapolis, 2018). On the politics of uncertainty at the nexus of science and technology studies and media infrastructure, see Rahul Mukherjee, *Radiant Infrastructures: Media, Environment,*

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  24. On the importance of the Great Kantō Earthquake in Japanese cinema, see Diane Wei Lewis, *Powers of the Real: Cinema, Gender, and Emotion in Interwar Japan* (Cambridge, MA, 2019); on the eruption of Etna and its resonances with cinema’s modern aesthetics, see Jean Epstein, *Le Cinématographe vu de l’Etna* (Paris, 1926) and Jennifer Wild, “Distance is (Im)material: Epstein versus Etna,” in *Jean Epstein: Critical Essays and New Translations*, eds. Sarah Keller and Jason N. Paul (Amsterdam, 2012), 115–42; on the Yangtze-Huai floods of 1931 and the emergence of leftist cinema in China, see Bao, *Fiery Cinema*, 167–72.
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  27. Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regimes*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, 2017).
  28. Thank you to Elizabeth Wijaya for bringing Pom Bunsermvicha’s film to our attention.
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  30. Zach Horton, “Composing a Cosmic View: Three Alternatives for Thinking Scale in the Anthropocene,” in *Scale in Literature and Culture*, eds. Michael Travel Clarke and David Wittenberg (London, 2017), 35.
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34. Charles S. Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York, 2000), 26–28.
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37. Charles S. Peirce, "The Fixing of Belief," in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York, 2000), 18.
38. See Zack Horton, *The Cosmic Zoom: Scale, Knowledge, and Mediation* (Chicago, 2021), for an excellent discussion of scalar difference and scalar access that decenters human perception while recognizing the human as a multiscale entity.