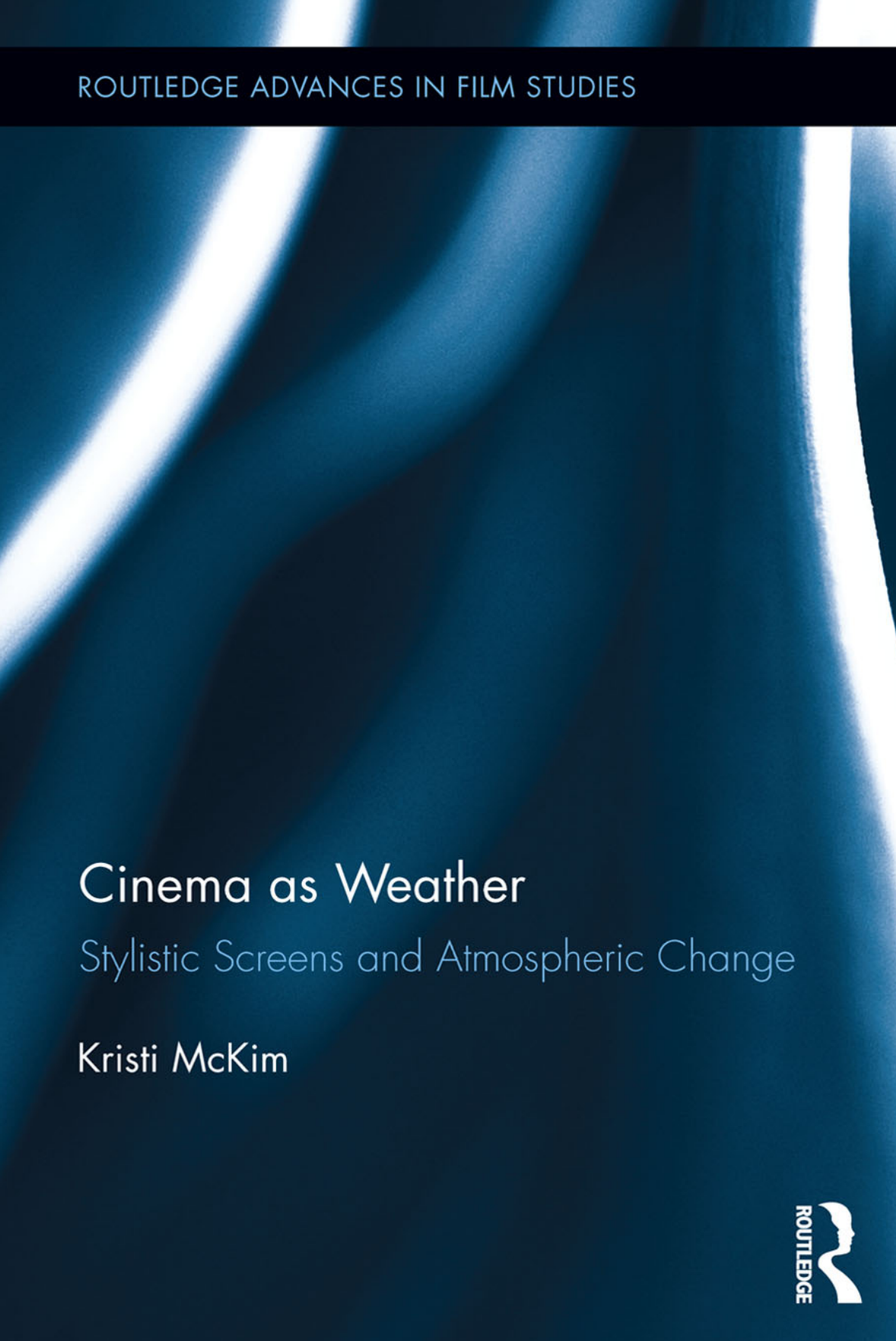
ROUTLEDGE ADVANCES IN FILM STUDIES
Cinema as Weather
Stylistic Screens and Atmospheric Change
Kristi McKim
ROUTLEDGE

Cinema as Weather

How do cinematic portrayals of the weather reflect and affect our experience of the world? While weatherly predictability and surprise can impact our daily experience, the history of cinema attests to the stylistic and narrative significance of snow, rain, wind, sunshine, clouds, and skies. Through analysis of films ranging from *The Wizard of Oz* to *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, from *Citizen Kane* to *In the Mood for Love*, Kristi McKim calls our attention to the ways that we read our atmospheres both within and beyond the movies.

Building upon meteorological definitions of weather's dynamism and volatility, this book shows how film weather can reveal character interiority, accelerate plot development, inspire stylistic innovation, serve as a momentary attraction, convey the passage of time, and idealize the world at its greatest meaning-making capacity (unlike our weather, film weather always happens *on time*, whether to further tumultuous, romantic, violent, suspenseful, or melodramatic ends).

Akin to cinema's structuring of ephemera, cinematic weather suggests aesthetic control over what is fleeting, contingent, wildly environmental, and beyond the human capacity to tame. This first book-length study of such a meteorological and cinematic affinity casts film weather as a means of artfully and mechanically conquering contingency through contingency, of taming weather through a medium itself ephemeral and enduring.

Using film theory, history, formalist/phenomenological analysis, and ecocriticism, this book casts cinema *as* weather, insofar as our skies and screens become readable through our interpretation of changing phenomena.

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Cinema as Weather

Stylistic Screens and Atmospheric Change

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

First published 2013
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Simultaneously published in the UK
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group,
an informa business

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

McKim, Kristi, 1977–
Cinema as weather : stylistic screens and atmospheric change /
by Kristi McKim.
p. cm. — (Routledge advances in film studies ; 22)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Weather in motion pictures. 2. Nature in motion pictures. I. Title.
PN1995.9.W37M35 2013
791.43'66—dc23
2012034878

ISBN: 978-0-415-89412-8 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-203-58390-6 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

For Mark William Barr,
in all weather

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Acknowledgments

This book exists because of the people with whom I've shared life-defining experiences of movies, rain, snow, sunlight, and seasons. Thanks to all of you.

Because this is the first project that I've undertaken, beginning to end, without formal graduate school supervision, I feel particularly indebted to the community of friends, colleagues, and family who have patiently welcomed my long-winded descriptions of and questions about this subject. At the 2010 Screen Studies Conference in Glasgow, I presented the first small section of what eventually would become this book; Mary Desjardins served as my panel chair, and, thanks to her supportive questions and suggestions—in addition to those from Virginia Bonner, Marc Furstenau, Chris Holmlund, Laura McMahon, and Lesley Stern—I became amply motivated to pursue this book project. In the months that followed, further conversations with impressive film colleagues and friends, Amelie Hastie, Patrick Keating, Aashish Kumar (and, again, Virginia Bonner!), helped me to conceive of this project with a conviction both scholarly and personal. Over the past years, the myriad fantastic discussions of film weather with colleagues, friends, and family are too many to acknowledge in full, but I feel particular appreciation for conversations and correspondence with Angella Beshara, Robin Clarke, Owen Egerton, Saryn Goldberg, Angela Hunter, Christian Keathley, Laura Langley, Rashna Richards, Girish Shambu, Trenton Lee Stewart, Stacey Swann, Mike Yang, and Josh Zelesnick. Special thanks to Paul Cantrell, for "perennial beauty" and more. Special thanks to Sarah Beth Estes for sharing so much of this, and so ebulliently.

I feel honored to publish this book with Routledge, and the editorial process has been every bit as smooth and impressive as I could have hoped from this esteemed press. I am grateful to Erica Wetter for championing *Cinema as Weather* in its early proposal stages and for swifting the project through to contract. Routledge's anonymous reviewers offered such energetic and helpful feedback that I reread their comments many times throughout the writing and revision process; I thank them for this care and support. Felisa Salvago-Keyes has been a wonderfully supportive, flexible, and patient editor; I'm grateful for her faith in this project and for the extra words with which I can thank her here. Thanks also to Catherine Tung for carefully

advising me on manuscript preparation, fielding my questions, and seeing this project through to publication. I am tremendously grateful to Vincent Gammill, who offered substantive feedback on these pages with an editorial keenness and thrilling scholarly rigor that challenged me to sharpen my writing in anticipation of his ideal readership; his vast knowledge of film, physics, music, and literature bolstered this project in timely, supportive, imaginative, and creative ways and buoyed my dedication to finishing. Thanks to a Hendrix College Faculty Project Grant from the Office of the Provost and the Committee on Faculty, I enjoyed the editorial support of Catelyn Gibbs, who worked tirelessly to transform my notes into proper Chicago style while also unearthing citations and ensuring precision in quotations and resources; her enthusiasm and good cheer helped push this project to the finish.

Thanks to an earlier Hendrix College Faculty Project Grant, I had the means to present work, acquire resources, and pursue archival research. Jenny Romero of the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences provided extraordinary assistance in her meticulous assemblage of weather-related bibliographic and archival materials. Joan Miller of the Wesleyan Cinema Archives provided help with the Frank Capra collection; Dorinda Hartmann helped me to assess the Orson Welles collection at the Wisconsin Center for Film and Television Research; and Steve Wilson of the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin assisted me with the Woody Allen collection. The collection of cinema-related books and the blissful workspace at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts (Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center) invigorated this book's early stages. Special thanks to Linda Harris Mehr, library director of the Margaret Herrick Library, for permission to quote from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Oral History collection (specifically Robert F. Boyle's oral history) in chapter 2 of this book.

In addition to these precious research opportunities that involved travel, I feel lucky that my daily working environment at Hendrix continually proves so supportive and intellectually stimulating. With thanks to my departmental colleagues Chuck Chappell, Hope Coulter, Robert Entzminger, Will Hacker, Amanda Hagood, Alice Hines, Tyrone Jaeger, Dorian Stuber, and Carol West; with thanks to Toni Wall Jaudon, for her great questions, honest support, and growing friendship in the final months of writing. With thanks to Alex Vernon, whose friendship helped this book—and every conversation—to feel more meaningful; his keen reading and brilliant feedback have undoubtedly bolstered this project at a most urgent time. Thanks to Peggy Morrison's feats of interlibrary-loaning, this book enjoys greater resources. Whenever asked about my Hendrix students, my eyes light with pride as I describe my fond impression of their exuberance and intelligence; thanks to the students of my many film classes for continuing to inspire such faith. The students of my "Cinematic Landscape and Atmosphere" seminar offered a consistently rewarding opportunity to explore new conceptions of

film and the environment; the students of my Non-Fiction Film and French New Wave courses helped me to reevaluate many of this book's examples, and I appreciate these classes' engaging open-mindedness in seeing cinematic worlds together. In classroom and independent study, I am happy to work with Anna Broadwell-Gulde, whose impressive synthesis of environmental, literary, and cinematic study suggests to me that she might well save the world. Caufield Schnug's lyrical and astute work on Agnès Varda's and Eric Rohmer's landscapes has become my standard for what undergraduate film writing—or even film scholarship more broadly—should be, and our years of animated and enriching film conversations undoubtedly figure into this book; I'm ecstatic that he soon will have the wider readership he deserves. My early film teachers, Robin Blaetz, John Champagne, Angela Dalle Vacche, and Dalia Judovitz, helped me to see; and my teachers and mentors and friends—Angelika Bammer, Matthew Bernstein, Gregory Morris, Karla Oeler, and Alan Michael Parker—make all of this writing and teaching matter within and beyond the classroom and book. Matthew Bernstein remains my star of film pedagogy; my memory of his lighting a room with brilliant student-engaged close analysis inspires me to try to be so good.

Writing a book affords me the precious opportunity to thank my beloved family publicly. Their support alleviates the scholarly pressure to write *well*, insofar they would mercifully love me no matter the quality of these pages; yet their support helps me to write *better* all the while. I thank my newest family members, Bill, Darlene, and Susan Barr, for cheering me on, for teaching me about the Arkansan agricultural seasons, and for fueling me with homegrown produce in the final summer weeks of writing. I publish this book in memory of my grandmother, Dorothy "Dolly" Irene Musitano, who died shortly before I submitted this manuscript for publication; the light in her eyes and the joy in her voice brightened my days more than the best sun. I publish this book in honor of my grandfather Bruni Anthony Musitano, in his ninetieth year, who cheerfully tells me about clouds passing and sun shining. My cherished memories of Anna Frances and Robert Alexander McKim tenderly highlight how this visible world also includes those whom we cannot see. Sharon Renee McKim's heroic readiness and successful feats in all circumstances—from stain removal to grief-consoling, from joint-fixing to wedding photography—makes me lucky that she's my family, increasingly so over these years. There's no one who has so deeply shared my world as Jason Bradley McKim, who continually floors me with gratitude for his generosity, sensitivity, and humor; I'd never have come to love the weather without his urging me to go outdoors, and I owe my exuberant exploration of the western Pennsylvania wilderness—and my courage to pursue subsequent adventures of all sorts—to his zestful and encouraging influence. For all this book's talk of weather's unpredictability and ubiquity, the love of my parents, Robert Bradley McKim and Brunita Irene Musitano McKim, has, by contrast, been the most constant, reliable, and powerful force I've ever known: my mother's gleeful inhabiting

(and creation) of joyful moments, weatherly or otherwise, and my father's quiet, thoughtful sensitivity to this meaningful world—in addition to their many virtues I haven't room to list here—have influenced me beyond measure; the writing of this book feels like a vital exercise of how they've subtly influenced me to see and feel. That they have always encouraged me to pursue what thrills me allows the enterprise of writing this book to feel not at the expense of but as part of my life, for which I am profoundly grateful.

Mark Barr has heard more about this book than anyone, from post-screening "that snow!" conversations to archival discoveries, from euphoric days of writing to their opposite. In addition to his peerless proofreading and copyediting, he has talked with me through the best and the worst, always inspiring me to believe more than disbelieve. Without fail, his rallying behind my ability to begin, sustain, and complete this project has energized me to do so joyfully. With him, I learn more every day about remaining constant amid changes. All weather becomes more pleasant in his company.

Introduction

For three seasons, *Downton Abbey* (2010–12) has enticed its record audiences with the possible romantic union of Lady Mary Crawley (Michelle Dockery) and Matthew Crawley (Dan Stevens), featuring sequences that reveal the couple's rising affection.[1] In episodes leading up to *Downton Abbey*'s post–Season Two Christmas special, the show's camerawork features heavyhanded stylistic choices that foreground Matthew and Mary's physical attraction; sweeping crane shots mimic their chaste yet desirous dancing, for example, as if to invite our subjective experience of their chemistry. Sensing that the plot mechanisms were pushing toward a climactic declaration of love, I wondered how *Downton Abbey* might mobilize its overdetermined moving camera or frequent point-of-view shots into a style that befits the gravity of this long-awaited plot event. Mindful of a long aesthetic lineage of romantic narrative closure imbedded within climactic style, I wondered at how this union might manifest as *style*.

Much to my surprise, the final scene of this climactic "postfinale finale" reframed my vigilant *Downton Abbey* viewing as a scholarly endeavor appropriate to my concurrent writing of *Cinema as Weather*: Matthew and Mary declare their love in an outdoor snowy nightscape, Mary's alabaster skin glimmering with radiance amid delicate falling snow, softening and enlivening the atmosphere as if decorating them beautifully for the occasion, the snowflakes gently flattering their faces. Too dense a snow, and their expressions would have been concealed from the camera; too great a wind, and their starry-eyed conversation would have involved urgent shelter-taking action or inaudible words; rain would have been too intense and sudden. Likewise, given that sunny afternoons and overcast mornings accompanied several of their previous conversations, comparably sunny or overcast weather might have diluted this climax through repetition. This snowfall introduces a *new* weather, befitting this narrative turn that yields their togetherness. Here, weather becomes more graceful and celebratory; weather makes itself *present* and visible, in accordance with these characters' public declarations. In an orchestration of romance and atmosphere, this snow falls perfectly within an environment that flatters them both. That this *Downton Abbey* scene explicitly foregrounds snowfall compels

many fans and critics to notice screened weather. *The Telegraph*'s Sarah Crompton claims that the show "has delivered the consummation devoutly to be wished. That handsome, kind-hearted Matthew has got down on one knee in front of Lady Mary in the gently falling snow, and she has agreed to be his wife. It wrapped up the Christmas special as perfectly as a gift."[2] *The Daily Mail*'s Jan Moir candidly writes of the swift proposal: "At this, snow started falling, violins soared. And millions of viewers roared their delight as the greatest 'will they, won't they' plotline since the pandas arrived at Edinburgh Zoo reached its natural conclusion."[3] As these and additional reviews, blogs, and synopses suggest, this *Downton Abbey* sequence makes weather-watchers of us all, insofar as we perceive the snow's contribution to plot and style.

As this scene attests, weather *always* happens perfectly as screened, while it epitomizes chance in our daily experience of meteorological contingency. Even in sequences less climactic and memorable, screened weather continually informs narrative, style, and spectatorial experience. A film that less overtly privileges the weather, *Jules and Jim* (François Truffaut, 1962), features the enmeshed triangle of Jules (Oskar Werner), Jim (Henri Serre), and Catherine (Jeanne Moreau), who whimsically give away their agency to the weather. After their famous race across the bridge, the camera matching Catherine's movements and the soundtrack conveying her breathlessness, the characters declare, "If it rains tomorrow, we'll go to the shore"; indeed, in the very next scene, an extreme long shot reveals their arrival at a beach house. The cut between their closer-scaled urban bridge setting and the longer-scaled sun-drenched vacation home seems to transport this trio in both space and time, a cut whose plot justification is the weather. Later in the film, when Catherine interrupts Jules and Jim's chess game to demand their attention, she announces her progress, courtesy of the men's company, from a melancholic posture to a laughing, ebullient expression. Pausing in freeze-frames that playfully exaggerate Catherine's facial features, the camera conveys and creates Catherine's subjective expression. Often likened to a force of nature herself, Catherine moves whimsically in a phenomenal dynamism and changeability. Throughout the film, her mutable desires—for Jim, for Jules, for other men—seem both to cause and to be caused by changing atmospheres; the film features sunlit fields, misty mornings, stormy skies that accompany the whirlpool-like plot movements. She sings "Le tourbillion," a repetitive melody about the whirlpool of life as a way of enchanting her lovers, and lives accordingly within a dynamism aligned with nature. When the film breaks from its early playfulness into the darker sobriety of the final scenes, dark clouds fill the sky, toward which the camera directly pans. The day of Catherine and Jim's fateful drive holds "an air of expectancy," as their tumultuous and volatile relationship drives itself into a tragic death; the even-keeled constant Jules survives as the character who figuratively embodies a steady and consistent weather. The trio's earlier contingency to rain forecasts the film's more general conveyance of plot and character: this film

about stability and ephemera entrenches the characters' own movements and interiorities in weatherly phenomena.

Practicing this weather sensitivity during the early stages of writing this book, at a screening of *Alice Adams* (George Stevens, 1935) at Austin's Paramount Theater, I appreciated that rain causes Alice (Katharine Hepburn) to wear her father's (Fred Stone) coat upon entering the dance; feeling vulnerable about her lower-class status (and her lack of proper raincoat), she overcompensates for her insecurities by feigning a higher class status. The summer *heat* of the final dinner scene, too, prompts the unraveling of this façade of a family, which has a servant (Hattie McDaniel) and which dresses fancily for a sit-down meal each evening; Alice's father's shirt buttons have popped open, revealing his overweight chest dripping with sweat, and Alice's suitor (Fred MacMurray) continually mops his brow, visibly melting under the intense familial awkwardness and heat (the latter cause, as with most nervous discourse, becomes the primary subject of this forced conversation). In *Alice Adams*, weather hardly yields extravagant special effects; yet weather quietly narrates the film's pressured moments. Similar to *Downton Abbey*'s romantic climax or *Jules and Jim*'s latent weather themes, *Alice Adams* unfolds newly when I consider its weather-focused environmental contingency, the artificial production of the natural here comparable to superficial yet defining hierarchies of class and race. *Cinema as Weather* considers both overt and memorable weather sequences, such as *Downton Abbey* models, and subtler and surprising films such as *Jules and Jim* and *Alice Adams*, which open newly through consideration of atmospheric change.

As the first book-length study of film weather, this volume situates cinematic weather within film theory, history, formalist/phenomenological analysis, and eco-film studies. Unwittingly mimicking the weather's dynamism, my methodology shifts among these terms;

- In relation to *film theory*, this book studies how film weather can reveal character interiority, catalyze plot development, constitute cinematic attraction, embody and impact cinematic time and space, synthesize plot and style (thus being a force of narration), generate narrative and stylistic delay, and become the literal screen for cinema's ephemeral yet tangible constitution.
- In relation to *film history*, this book highlights the cinematic contours of meteorological history and the meteorological contours of cinematic history; this book imagines how weather's dynamism might alter existing histories of perception as based on stable landscapes. This book also briefly traces the history of producing and recording film weather.
- In relation to *formalist/phenomenological analysis*, this book argues and illustrates that attention to film weather expands analytical capacity by calling attention to environmental changes in film atmosphere;

moreover, this book establishes "atmospheric identification" as a means of conflating the spectator-screen experience and engaging us environmentally (instead of through traditional modes of suture, such as point-of-view shots), as we imaginatively bridge the gap between screened weather and the weather of our screening experience.

- In relation to *eco-film studies*, this book highlights the reassuring predictability of filmed weather in comparison with worldly weather (subject to climate change and global warming) so as to reveal changes in our environment *beyond* cinema; this book models a perceptual sensitivity toward the atmosphere that could have political implications for our current and future ecosystems.

Framed by the timely historical confluence of cinema's first public screening and the publication of the first *International Cloud Atlas*, chapter 1 unpacks the atmospheric and perceptual similarities between film and weather within the contexts of early film theory, mass audiences, cinematic realism, and cinephilia. Through historical and archival sources, chapter 2 highlights the cinematic underpinnings of meteorological history and expands histories of visual culture by factoring weather into modes of perception; considering scholarship on early film (which overlooks the weather) and early film examples *of* the weather, this chapter also briefly traces the weather's significance to the growth of the studio system as well as weather's impact on shooting schedules. Through theories of narrative, chapter 3 considers weather's function in cinematic narration, furthering plot through stylistic conveyance of atmospheric causality and character interiority. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 address specific forms of weather: rain, snow, and sunlight/seasons. These three chapters each begin by reflecting upon details of the weather form that individuate and complicate it as a cinematic subject; snow, for example, has greater density and opacity than rain, though it falls more quietly and—depending on wind speed—with a graceful temporality that often evokes nostalgia (as *Downton Abbey* illustrates). These three chapters include a catalogue of analyses that focus on individual films, a way of opening up films to weather analysis and modeling what sustained weather-focused film attention—as it privileges a variety of methods—might entail.

Given that no prior books have taken up the history and theory of cinematic weather, *Cinema as Weather* at once flourishes within this productive new space yet also strains under the critical pressure to fill all of these scholarly gaps—historical, theoretical, eco-critical, formalist, phenomenological—at once. I am acutely and humbly aware of this book's mere hinting at what I find to be profound yet unwritten connections between cinema and atmosphere; I've chosen exuberant breadth, however, over extended development of any of the chapters described. As an example of this compromise, and as my *Jules and Jim* example suggests, the conflation of women and cinematic weather fits squarely within a history of aligning women and nature in ways that precipitate women's cultural and societal disenfranchisement;[4] *Jules and Jim*'s Catherine also exemplifies how women have defined

cinema through their illustrious yet disempowered role as spectacle.[5] In addition, both *Downton Abbey* and *Jules and Jim* epitomize weather as a site that further underscores cinema's production of heteronormative romance, though *Jules and Jim* interrogates its sustainability as *Downton Abbey* reifies its "natural"-ness. With unsurprising frequency, as this book implicitly illustrates, cinematic weather's own spectacular role often intersects with starry female performances that involve heterosexual romantic coupling—so much so that I nearly restructured this book to privilege overtly gender, weather, and cinema.

This book remains *Cinema as Weather* because, instead of establishing a more content-driven argument about representation *in* film, I want to privilege the temporal and spatial underpinnings of cinematic weather as more a new way of *reading* and *seeing* film, a way of generating *further* ways of seeing and reading (gender and sexuality would be one crucial mode of interpretation here). I take my cue from Laura Mulvey, whose earlier "preoccup[ation] by Hollywood's ability to construct the female star as ultimate spectacle, the emblem and guarantee of its fascination and power," has shifted its focus to how "those moments of spectacle were also moments of narrative halt"; Mulvey's interest in cinematic movement and stillness, including but hardly limited to gender, arises from the contemporary expansion of media technologies (e.g., remote controls, DVD players, streaming) that enable new modes of spectatorship.[6] No longer solely at the mercy of spectatorial modes that replicate heteronormative, patriarchal, ethnocentric, or eco-exploitative consumption, we have the technological and phenomenological capacity to "halt" the narrative, to isolate sequences, and to impose our own contemplative expansion of space and time—an engagement that this book hopes to model. My hope is that *Cinema as Weather* might stimulate a reader's imagination to stretch, continue, and challenge my ideas herein.

This book models a phenomenological approach that relies less on environmental or ecological content *within* the film (a good portion of ecocritical writing focuses on films with overt environmental themes, thereby restricting one's scholarly approach to whatever is *inside* the film instead of how we might *regard* the film). Combining theories of cinematic time, narrative, landscape, and subjectivity, this book further seeks to add cinematic weather to existing ecocriticism. Privileging literary contours, Cheryll Glotfelty explains that "[e]cocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman."[7] Shifting its focus from literature to images in ways comparable to *Ecosee*'s interest in "the study and the production of the visual (re)presentation of space, environment, ecology, and nature in photographs, paintings, television, film, video games, computer media, and other forms of image-based media," *Cinema as Weather* also additionally shifts its focus from land to atmosphere, narrowing *Ecosee*'s breadth of visual media into cinema and expanding existing scholarship to include weather.[8]

Instead of focusing on the "weather film" as a genre or subject, this book tries to establish a way of seeing that exhibits newfound atmospheric sensitivity to film and weather as comparable life-defining phenomena. In *Hollywood Utopia: Ecology in Contemporary American Cinema*, Pat Brereton claims, "Filmic time and space is dramatised, often above and beyond strict narrative requirements, and serves, whether accidentally or not, to reconnect audiences with their inclusive ecosystems."[9] In his introduction to *Landscape and Power*, W.J.T. Mitchell acknowledges the absence of essays about cinema in his edited collection but insists that "moving pictures of landscape are, in a very real sense, the subtext of these revisionist accounts of traditional motionless landscape images . . . landscape is a dynamic medium . . . itself in motion from one place or time to another."[10] Assuming Brereton's claim that cinematic space and time involve a spectator's own ecosystem, this book not only foregrounds "moving pictures of landscape" but also shifts focus from the actual *land* to the atmosphere acting upon and inciting change within landscapes.

Moreover, this book adds to traditional conceptions of landscape—imagined, regarding English landscapes, as an "alternative to portraiture or even of resistance to what portraiture tends to picture"—the coexistence of human figures, better known as our film stars.[11] In internationally distributed and critically acclaimed films, memorable, attractive, talented human actors exist within historically informed deployments of landscape and atmosphere. As this book's examples suggest, sequences of cinematic weather often profoundly feature a film star being "weathered," so to speak, by wind, rain, snow, sunlight; instead of a competition between landscape and portrait, cinematic weather sequences posit the human *as* landscape, acted upon, even as cinematic portraiture affords an evocative expression that underscores and intensifies the weather. Cinematic weather collapses the binaries between landscape and portraiture, between character and environment, thus illuminating multiple forces and dynamics: the beauty and notoriety of film stars; the power, authority, and privilege implicit within landscape painting; the Romantic sublimity and aesthetic conveyance of nature; the achievements of cinematic technology in representing and transforming the world; the spatial and temporal contours of a world—its atmosphere, environment, people, relationships—in flux.

This book's range of film examples reflects my own entrenchment within American and European narrative cinema; if I had more time and space, this study would productively expand and gain complexity by engaging global cinema and documentary film beyond what I include here. The sheer fact that variance in geographical perspective yields vastly different weather, for example, means that—while the diegetic weather doesn't change in accordance with screening locations—the ways of *reading* such weather vary in relation to local norms and patterns. The landscapes of Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak, for example, enjoy attention in Wimal Dissanayake's "Landscapes of Meaning in Cinema: Two Indian Examples,"[12] and these brief pages only hint at the productive scholarship that could emerge by

foregrounding atmospheric change. Moreover, India's monsoon season enjoys jubilant and sensual expression in Bollywood's spectacles of rain songs, which inspire analysis within genres of romance and musical in addition to style and politics. If, as Alan Bewell describes with regard to Thomas Jefferson's American vision (see chapters 2 and 3), weather creates national identity, then weather excitingly establishes new parameters by which national cinemas might be regarded within aesthetic, sociopolitical, and environmental contexts. Every national cinema, every avant-garde film, every moving image, after all, somehow involves the environment, and this environment always involves the atmosphere. While I risk diluting the unique value of weather-focused criticism by arguing for its vast appropriateness, I nonetheless want enthusiastically to champion this new attention as a means of unsettling our scholarly patterns, of shifting our planes of focus, of taking interest in the atmosphere in a new vigilance of cinematic weather-watching.

This project arises from my realization that, in teaching and studying film, I continually dwell with delight in sequences of weatherly spectacle. Leading discussions of *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra, 1934) in a class on film comedy, for example, or screening *Rain* (Joris Ivens, 1929) as a documentary film left me in want of film scholarship that correlates these rainy phenomena in history and theory; moreover, I realized that my film memory crystallizes in scenes of weather, its striking deviation from or establishment of atmospheric patterns: *Manhattan*'s (Woody Allen, 1979) romantic rain, *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*'s (Jacques Demy, 1964) hyperbolic snow, *Do the Right Thing*'s (Spike Lee, 1989) exceptional heat, *Grande Illusion*'s (Jean Renoir, 1937) peaceful closing snowscape. In some of my own experiences of worldly weather that have happened perfectly (the hard rain after a long run on a hot Atlanta day; the heavy, traffic-slowing snowfall in Greenwich Village at night; the glimmering sunlight of a late-afternoon wedding along the Arkansas River; the sled-riding and mud-sliding childhood fun along Hickory Creek; the purple sky and clear rainbow in Berlin; the sublimity of evening light and monsoon rains along the rim of the Grand Canyon), I've felt ecstatic to experience a synchronicity or serendipity I've otherwise known as cinematic, insofar as the *movies* taught me that weather could sometimes perfectly contribute to or enable a desirable situation. Of course, given the number of unfortunate weather conditions I've experienced or observed, I appreciate that such film-modeled orchestration hardly becomes the trend; moreover, as I write this introduction during a summer leveled with drought and devastating fires, I'm mindful of an accelerated climate change that heightens seasonal and annual unpredictability. I write this book because I've come to rely on the thrill and comfort provided by both weather and cinema; weather—its balminess, fragrance, thunder, wind, sublimity, banality, all of it—carries for me the memory of a past that fleetingly returns in the spring air or the post-rain light; this quality of atmospheric movement and return, of familiarity and longing, of loss and discovery, incites metaphorical contours that echo

my experience of cinema—this immaterial yet transformative medium that I live, study, teach, share, and love.

As a child, I sent away for NOAA's (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) kid-friendly weather-watching materials, which taught me how to anticipate and prepare for storms; I graphed daily barometric pressure in comparison with temperature and rainfall (as measured by my amateur backyard rain gauge), as if I could stave off tornadoes by simply preparing for them. In a correlation that I realized only as I wrote this book, I also, slightly earlier, borrowed my parents' camera to photograph what I acutely feared I would lose (first, the televisual presence of *Sesame Street*'s dying Mr. Hooper and, later, everything else). Though perhaps I temper my professional credibility by tracing such an autobiographical history, I nonetheless want to clarify that my method and interest have grown out of this childhood affinity for and fascination with vigilantly taming the weather and photographically thwarting loss. In these scenarios of tumultuous weather and human mortality, I tried for knowledge that might translate into preparedness, as if being ready might fend off loss or surprise. Though I've since learned the faultiness of such reasoning, my early fascination with weather continually *becomes* my cinematic perception, as my cinematic perception enriches my appreciation for skies and atmospheric phenomena. In recent years, I have increasingly come to love crafting and revising sentences about environmental change as it bears upon human portraiture and spectatorial attention; in other words, writing about weather affords a doubly dynamic enterprise, the study of tumultuous, volatile, mercurial atmospheric phenomena within a medium itself defined by change, movement, and stasis. *Cinema as Weather* thus arises from and enables a way of being sensitive to my—to our—desires for knowledge about, control over, and enthrallment with what changes.

As with many scholarly pursuits, authors live and breathe their subjects in the world beyond the narrow parameter of our writing. Over many seasons of several years, my ideas about cinematic weather have taken shape in front of a variety of windows and screens, before which I have compared the rewindable and predictable cinematic weather with the slower, less predictable changes of the outdoors. I wrote several pages on snow, for example, during a hot week in June; my description of the cool snow harnesses my own fantasy of wintry relief from summer heat, as if film weather could assuage as much as reflect weather in the world. My increased sensitivity to atmospheric change alongside my keener attention to cinematic weather clarifies the attention and care that I hope this book can encourage: to try to understand the connectedness between film and world through atmospheric conditions; to appreciate how film weather can meaningfully impact narrative, style, and audience; and to better comprehend (or at least to crystallize) film's tenuous balance between serendipity and determinism, between ephemera and permanence, between visual culture and environmental study.[13]

1 Revealing Skies and Screens: The Confluence of Weather and Cinema

In the late nineteenth century, both skies and screens became readable to a mass audience with the publication of the first *International Cloud Atlas* and the first commercial film exhibition: on December 28, 1895, the Lumière brothers screened their short films in the Salon Indien of the Grand Café in Paris,[1] and the first edition of the photographic *International Cloud Atlas* appeared in 1896. Deeming 1896 the "International Year of the Clouds,"[2] the International Meteorological Society "realised that an understanding of the weather depended on coordinated observations across national boundaries—something that relied on agreed terminology" and "published a pictorial reference book to coincide with the 1896 International Meteorological Conference in Paris."[3] Within one year, the same city hosts both the first film exhibition and the release of the first internationally conceived photographic means of reading the skies. These two events have more in common than geographical or calendar proximity.

Whereas weatherly predictability and surprise can impact daily experience, more than a century of cinema can attest to the weather's significance within filmic expression and narrative development. With early examples ranging from the whirling, life-threatening storms of F. W. Murnau's *Sunrise* (1927) to Joris Ivens's glorious poetic documentary *Rain* (1929), filmmakers have incorporated weather as an impetus for narrative progression and innovative cinematic expression; cinematic weather often prompts moments of aesthetic experimentation (how to *show* this rainstorm?). Akin to cinema's ordering and structuring of ephemera, cinematic weather suggests aesthetic mastery or narrative control over what changes. While meteorologists study and predict weather patterns, while writers incorporate descriptions of environmental phenomena into fiction and nonfiction, and while ecologists examine the effect of weather upon ecosystems over time, cinema enjoys the privileged yet fraught position of *showing* weather, through studio/post-production creation or the actual "capturing" of atmospheric phenomena as they occur. In *The Virtual Life of Film*, David Rodowick defines a medium as "nothing more nor less than a set of potentialities from which creative acts may unfold."[4] *Cinema as Weather* establishes weather as a medium, in the spirit of calling our attention to the ways that we read

our atmospheres both within and beyond cinema. In *Atlas of Emotion*, Giuliana Bruno highlights the spatial affinity between cinema and architecture, insofar as "[a]rchitecture is a map of both dwelling and travel, and so is the cinema. These spaces, which exist between housing and motion, question the very limits of opposition and force us to rethink cultural expression itself as a site of both travel and dwelling."[5] For Bruno, cinema and architecture both map and move us through space; *Cinema as Weather* focuses on how space itself—as atmosphere more than architectural structure—moves within our experience of cinematic weather. This book casts cinema *as* weather, insofar as moments of cinematic animation mimic and often feature weatherly phenomena.

Film histories often acknowledge the "twin imperatives of science and entertainment [that] led to the projection of photographic moving images," and these film histories expectedly privilege optical developments as the scientific component of this "twin imperative."[6] Within this conflation of science and entertainment, meteorology—or, more precisely, cinematic weather—occupies a latent yet compelling position within film history and theory. With cinematic exhibition, a significant catalyst of mass culture, a screen emerges that collectivizes a public; with meteorological developments geared toward a more precise reading of the atmosphere (of which the *International Cloud Atlas*'s publication marks the most significant pictorial and universal to that date), the always-above-us sky becomes an emergent screen that yields atmospheric knowledge. On this latter development, *Nature* featured an article, "The Photographic Observation of Clouds," in 1897 that offers the following:

> It is a commonplace to say that the phenomena that present themselves most frequently are also those that are least observed with accuracy and intelligence. The ever-changing aspect of our sky, and the screen of vapour covering that adds charm to landscape and variety to scenery, present numberless opportunities for study and critical examination, but they have long waited for adequate description and representation.[7]

Ascribing patience to the clouds that have "long waited for adequate description and representation," this piece acknowledges the "numberless opportunities for study and critical examination" and, after mourning the dearth of adequate artistic or photographic representations of clouds, proceeds to embrace the "recently issued *International Cloud Atlas*, a work that may possibly revolutionise our methods of cloud observation."[8] Just as reading the skies becomes ever more possible thanks to aesthetic and technological developments, so too does cinematic experience become a comparable screen—an aesthetic sky—by which to read and experience the world. While weather has always been writ on the skies above us